

# **Against the** *Current*

a socialist quarterly magazine

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## **"Blockade" against apartheid**



- **Nuclear Exterminism & Deterrence**
- **Women Writers of the Left**
- **The Evolution of Lenin**
- **DSA and the Economic Crisis**



The graphic artist would like to express regret for some of the paragraphs which were transposed during pasteup of Val Moghadam's article on Workers' Councils in Iran in the last issue.

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a socialist quarterly magazine sponsored by Workers Power

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## Columbia University "Blockade"

by Aaron Brenner\*

**O**n April 4th, the anniversary of Martin Luther King's assassination, a demonstration against apartheid at Columbia University became the first flower to bloom in a spring of nationwide divestment protests. The demonstration began simply enough with the usual chanting and speeches. But in little over an hour, and with the prophetic chant of "Remember '68, before it's too late," it became a "blockade against apartheid" whose aim it was to halt business as usual at Columbia until the trustees publicly announced their intention to divest all holdings in companies doing business in South Africa.

In a matter of hours the blockade was transformed into a living organism, alive with discussion, politics, commitment and sacrifice. Within days it was the heart of a national network of student struggles for divestment. After a few weeks it became a full blown institution, complete with media representatives, press agents, envelope lickers, leaflet writers, chefs and bureaucrats. And by the end of a month it was a reminder of the potential power of collective student and worker action.

### The First Days

The divestment struggle awoke a potential that socialists have always known existed—viz. the educational, political and social power of mass action. Through such action, specifically the blockade and the many rallies surrounding it, large numbers of students, faculty, workers, activists and community members educated and politicized themselves around the issues of apartheid in South Africa, racism in America, and divestment at Columbia.

Of course, the consciousness of individuals on the blockade, and in the steering committee of the Coalition for a Free South Africa (which provided the leadership at Columbia), was not uniform. In some cases, people became very quickly radicalized and some one or two even joined socialist groups. In other cases, there was little change in consciousness. Nevertheless, the blockade at Columbia and the similar actions at other campuses did prove that very basic Marxist tenet that consciousness changes through struggle.

For the first time in many years students and others

addressed a political issue in the streets and on the campuses. Connections between issues and links between groups were made at a fantastic rate. Moreover, for the first time in many years, students, the Harlem community and unionized workers joined together on an issue as it was being fought out. When was the last time the Teamsters donated one thousand dollars to a student militant action and then pledged one hundred dollars a day for as long as the action lasted? It certainly didn't happen in the '60s. And not since the '60s have Harlemites climbed the hill to voice their opposition to Columbia's racist policies in South Africa, in New York and on campus.

Typical of so many student political actions, the blockade at Columbia was disorganized. It was completely unexpected. The Committee for a Free South Africa had planned a civil disobedience action for the April 4th Day of Protest, but they believed that the blockade would not last longer than a day. Either the police would arrest the protesters or the students would get bored and go home. Fortunately, neither happened.

At about 11:00 a.m. on April 4th, 150 students chained the front doors of Hamilton Hall, the main college classroom building, and sat down on the steps in front. Their demand was that the Columbia board of trustees publicly announce its intention to divest all holdings in companies doing business with South Africa within the next three months. Their slogan was "No business as usual until Columbia divests."

What "No business as usual" would mean was not clear since the blockade was not complete. There was another entrance to Hamilton Hall which the steering committee decided should be left open. The steering committee felt that it would antagonize the students if it kept them from entering the building. On the one hand, students were to be allowed to go to classes if they

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wanted. On the other hand, it was hoped that they would not "break the blockade." The committee hoped for something between a purely symbolic protest and out-and-out confrontation. If all went well, the University would call in the police and the students would be arrested as the politicians and celebrities in front of the South African embassy had been a short time before.

The first weekend of the blockade (it began on Thursday) was the most exciting politically. Over the first four days the population and intensity grew geometrically. Because there was no well-established leadership to ensure that events ran smoothly, the body of the blockade, which ranged from 100 to 500 people that weekend, acted as it pleased. All decisions were made collectively, not by direct vote, but by loose consensus. Anyone who wished to address the blockade was immediately welcomed.

And people talked. Men and women came from all over the world to deliver messages of solidarity and contribute a few words of political and tactical advice. The entire spectrum of the left and center chipped in its two cents. Most important, the Harlem community, every section of it, marched to Columbia to provide moral and material support. The population of the blockade fluctuated. About 100 students were there full-time. Towards the end of each day the blockade would grow as more students, faculty, staff and supporters came after work and classes were over. The daily demonstrations drew 500-600 people.

The atmosphere was one of education. The predominantly white blockaders were taught about racism, sexism, oppression and exploitation by an endless stream of community and religious leaders and by political activists of all races. Blockaders discussed everything under the sun. Naturally, most discussion centered on what to do, how to win divestment. But that of course raised all sorts of other questions: What are the interests of the trustees? Where is the power in the university? What is the role of the media? How else do we attack apartheid? To whom do we look for support? What kind of support do we want? What further actions can we take?

The issues of divestment and apartheid lent themselves automatically to other political questions: What is the nature of apartheid? How should it be fought? What are US interests in South Africa? How do we fight racism in New York City? What is the university's relationship to racism both at home and abroad? And so on. Luckily, the blockaders had little else to do but discuss these vital questions. As a result, the level of consciousness continued to rise through the first week or so.

The university threatened all sorts of disciplinary procedures against the blockaders in an attempt to divide them. Those with previous academic difficulties were singled out. Others who had been activists in the past were also specifically threatened with expulsion. The university took video tapes of the blockade and used them to identify and intimidate the protestors. Many "first-time offenders" were hauled before administrators for intimidation sessions.

Talk about arrests was high on the blockade but the University barely considered the move. Columbia's President Michael Sovern was the professor who negotiated the sell out in 1968. To diffuse student unrest and institutionalize their protest, Sovern helped set up the "stu-

dent senate." It had no power and continues to go unnoticed by the trustees today. In 1968, bringing the police on campus had plunged Columbia's reputation and endowment into depression. Sovern did not want to repeat the mistake. Instead of calling in the police forcibly to eject the students, the University launched a legal campaign against the blockade. Lawyers for the University won an injunction against the blockade. And the police handed out summonses, charging students with contempt of court for being on the blockade, as they sat in lectures. Meanwhile, lawyers from both sides battled it out in court as the University tried to use the courts to scare the students. It was a two-pronged attack: discipline through the University's own channels and through the long arm of the law.

But in every case, the blockaders decided that unity was the best policy. They set up a committee to deal just with disciplinary hearings and the like. All threatened students were offered counsel from the blockade's legal advisors and popular support at any hearings. Much energy was spent fighting the University at the hearings and in the courts. Students were encouraged to boycott Columbia's hearings and attend the proceedings downtown to influence the judge's decision. They quickly lost any illusions that the administration had their best interests at heart, though they still felt Sovern could be reasoned with.

The lessons of the media and the police were also learned, although they were not driven home. The *New York Times* did not put a blockade story on the front page until it ended. And the police were less than pleasant in serving summonses to students while they were in their classes.

Students directly experienced, mostly for the first time, all these manifestations of a system bent on preserving profits, racism and exploitation. And the lessons did not fall on deaf ears. Few, if any, were ready to condemn capitalism, in part because they had no alternative but mostly because such anti-capitalist ideas are so foreign to them. Nevertheless, the contradictions faced every day on the blockade did push most of the students to the left. If it is an indication, Jesse Jackson quickly became more popular than Walter Mondale. Even better, students began to say that they lived in Harlem, since they shared the same zip code.

All the students wanted to stay, and they denounced any talk of compromise. They had made a commitment and they wanted to keep it. As more obstacles arose, like the courts, the media and the University, their perspective widened. Critical ideas and confrontational action made more sense when the University threatened discipline and refused to act. The administration would neither arrest nor meet with the students. The administration's tactic was to let the blockade fizzle out. Moreover, as the frustration of days without action grew, the talk of an occupation made more sense. The University was not responding, as was first hoped. So, many students began to feel that they would have to force it to make a move. Nevertheless, a number of circumstances conspired to limit how far the blockaders could ultimately move.

## Institutionalization

After the first weekend, the steering committee of the



Coalition for a Free South Africa recovered from its confusion and actual physical illness. Most of the steering committee, which was almost all black, had been fasting for ten days when the blockade began. They did not end their fast until the fifth day of the blockade, when they met with President Sovorn. As they recovered from the fast, the steering committee was able to assert more control over the blockade.

The steering committee was made up of about ten men and women from the Coalition at Columbia. I say "about" because it was never spelled out to me or the blockaders just who was on the steering committee. They were not elected. Going into April 4th they were entirely black. Once the fast started during the week before the blockade, the fasters became the steering committee since they were all in the same room. In this manner, two white men, who had joined the fast, became steering committee members when the fast ended on the fourth day of the blockade.

On a suggestion from one of the blockaders, a socialist, the steering committee decided to hold daily rallies at 5:30 for as long as the blockade lasted. These drew well, between five and six hundred almost every day. The rallies lasted for about two hours each day and contained the most militant activity of the blockade.

Other suggestions that were made to the steering committee included leafleting around campus, going door-to-door in the dorms, distributing solidarity armbands, walking informational and real pickets at other classroom buildings and campus delivery entrances, setting up information tables in the middle of campus, and making announcements in the cafeteria. None of these proposals was ever formally accepted and only the suggestions for informational tables and armbands were ever occasionally implemented.

The steering committee spent most of its time organizing the media. Conferences were held, press releases were typed and phone calls were made. *Newsweek* and *Time* played up the fact that these were truly protestors of the eighties because they used a personal computer to organize the press coverage. At the same time, the media, especially Doonesbury, were on the mark in characterizing the blockade as passive, non-violent and almost inactive. Doonesbury's cartoon characterization of protestors handing the police a list of those to be arrested was not all that far from the steering committee's actual, though unsuccessful attempt *secretly* to negotiate an arrest of the blockaders with the administration.

Using the media, as the steering committee did, is not in itself a bad thing. But the steering committee tended to raise manipulation of the media to the level of strategy. To do this has unavoidable implications. If getting media coverage and support from the media audience is your top priority, you tend to try to make your actions acceptable to the media and its audience. This means, inevitably, playing down militancy and mass action and limiting the political ideas which can come into play. At the same time, since relying on the media tends to mean substituting media coverage for mass action, this strategy tends to put responsibility for the movement into the hands of a few leaders, who act as spokespeople for the movement.

The steering committee's concentration on the media

came at the expense of building the divestment struggle on campus and in New York. Much more could have been done to gain support on the campus and to put pressure on the university. Instead, the steering committee concentrated its efforts on the court battles, secret negotiations with the administration and the media. The negotiations had the goal of getting the university to arrest the students. They were not discussed on the blockade.

The steering committee strayed from its original "No business as usual" slogan. Rather than do all that it could to disrupt the normal routine of the university, the steering committee decided to make the blockade as innocuous as possible. A daily study period was declared every afternoon between 2:00 p.m. and 5:00 p.m., the very time when classes were in full swing. No music or noise was allowed after 8:00 p.m. on the blockade. Every attempt to settle into a routine was made. For organizational purposes, the move worked well. No one got sick. People ate. Everyone stayed warm and dry. But politically, the blockade stagnated because no actions were taken, except for the daily rallies. More energy could have been poured into building the struggle on campus, getting more people involved and putting pressure on the university by disrupting its routine.

The steering committee had a clear political perspective that informed most of their decisions. They were not politically innocent. Most had been activists for a number of years. They had no perspective of relying on rank and file democracy and initiative. Instead, they made their decisions behind closed doors and then brought them to the blockade in fully-worked out form and allowed no opportunity for discussion. All the blockaders did was o.k. the moves of the steering committee.

Moreover, the steering committee discouraged political discussion on the blockade, especially over questions of strategy for the protest. They did their best to prevent people with different ideas from taking those ideas to the blockaders as a whole. The steering committee controlled the microphone. They even decided the agenda of the few rap sessions that took place. Sometimes the discussions touched on strategic issues and not simply where to get food or how many leaflets to make (not that those things are unimportant). But no organizational form existed to incorporate the discussion on the questions of how to win divestment into the decision making process. The steering committee simply made all the decisions in their meetings, and these were not discussed on the blockade.

The blockaders were simply a consulting body to which the steering committee came every once in a while. I and others often tried to raise with the steering committee different strategies that involve mass action and rank and file participation. But we could not get a vote on them since the steering committee did everything by consensus. We could only speak to individuals as we sat with them.

The most glaring examples of the steering committee's elitist political approach came in the last week of the blockade. The blockade began to wear down after about two weeks. On the night of April 18th, there were two simultaneous mass marches to Columbia from Harlem and the Upper West Side. These were not well



planned or publicized but the turnout was the largest of the blockade, close to 2,000 people. Jesse Jackson had not drawn as many people two days earlier.

As it turned out, the resulting demonstration was the swan song of the blockade. The militancy that night was the highest it had been since the beginning of the blockade. By nine in the evening there were still 500 people chanting and marching around campus. They approached the main university administration building where a formal alumni dinner was taking place. But rather than taking this opportunity to initiate a militant mass confrontation with the University, the leadership decided to surround the building with a human chain. This tactic effectively isolated people from one another and diffused the collective energy and determination. When the alumni started filing out, the demonstrators again gathered together to shout at them, but, again, the leadership maneuvered to calm down the militancy. The campus priest was called in to quiet the crowd. He told people that this was not the place for raised fists and shouting. Then one of the steering committee members got up to tell the crowd that the alumni were on "our side." People clearly were ready to take action, but they were given absolutely no direction in which to focus their energy. Instead their militancy was consciously diffused.

After the demonstration was concluded, the only question which remained was when to end the blockade. The steering committee leaked a plan to the press and then proposed it to the blockaders. Their proposal was that the blockade end the following Thursday with a march to Harlem where there was a kick-off for a voter registration drive and the candidacy of Vernon Mason for Manhattan District Attorney.

On the Monday night before the proposed march, there was a big, open debate on the steering committee's proposal. It was the first open debate since the blockade started! After hours of very heated discussion, the meeting voted down the steering committee's proposal in the first formal vote ever taken on the blockade. The blockaders decided to stay out at least until the following Sunday. Oliver Tambo, the leader of the African National Congress, would be in town then and the blockaders believed they could end with a big rally on campus. It must be emphasized that the blockaders did not oppose the march to Harlem proposed by the steering committee; in fact, they suggested that it go on as planned. They just did not want the blockade to end with the Thursday march. They left it up to the steering committee to come up with a schedule of events for the remainder of the week, and put off the vote on that schedule until the next morning.

The following morning the steering committee came out with exactly the same proposal that had been voted down the night before. They claimed that they knew better than the rest of the blockaders and actually hinted at racism on the part of the blockaders for not endorsing the march to Harlem. The white committee members were pushed to the background and the Black committee members portrayed the debate of the previous night as an attack on "our brothers in Harlem who have helped us so much." But, of course, the previous night's meeting had approved the march. Those of us blockaders who remained that morning were predominantly white, as was usual for the blockade. We tried to

argue just as we had the night before but much of the support had gone home or to class or to work. The race-baiting and the determination of the steering committee won the day. The blockade ended on Thursday, April 25th, three weeks after it began, with a very moving march to Harlem.

### Politics

The method of operation that the steering committee chose actually compounded the tactical, strategic and political problems on the blockade. By ignoring the rank and file of the blockade and discouraging debate, the steering committee offered no concrete avenues of participation for large numbers of people. They were content with the 50 to 100 people sitting on the steps of Hamilton Hall and the 15 to 20 media people there each day. In fact, as noted, on several occasions the steering committee went out of their way to discourage militancy and limit democracy. The lack of democracy on the blockade and the elitist strategy of media blitzes and legal battles reduced participation by the community and encouraged the dwindling of the ranks. It was not surprising that eventually the blockade ran out of steam. There were no actions proposed to involve larger numbers of people.

It is not as if there was a conspiracy on the part of the steering committee to dominate and control the blockade for its own ends. The steering committee members had basically left-wing Democratic Party politics. They saw electoral campaigns, media blitzes and court battles as the main weapons of political contestation. As a result of this political perspective, they honestly believed that their actions were correct and the ones most likely to prove fruitful. Coming off years of unsuccessful struggle on campus, without the experience of mass action and given the dominance of left Democratic Party politics in the Black community (Jesse Jackson and the Rainbow Coalition), is hardly surprising that the steering committee had little faith in the mass of students, or in mass action, or democratic processes. They did not know another route, and knew better than to let control slip.

But there were alternatives. With a different political perspective, the steering committee could likely have achieved better results. Rather than concentrating all the effort on the media and the law issues, the steering committee might have taken a more directly confrontational stance. Mass rallies during class hours, picket lines (both informational and real), support committees, informational campaigns, student strikes, solidarity campaigns, door-to-door dorm announcements, fundraisers, and occupations. These are methods which have the very important characteristic of involving large numbers of people, and all these could have been tried with a reasonable chance for success. These tactics could have put the University on the defensive. They could also have brought in people who could not spend days sitting on the steps of Hamilton Hall but sought avenues of participation in the struggle.

The decision making processes also could have been very different. The steering committee could have invited debate on even the most mundane issues of the daily running of the blockade. This would have increased the commitment of the blockaders by increasing their involvement. By increasing the involvement



and opening up the blockade to real democratic practices, the steering committee could have achieved three major gains.

First, for the blockade to be democratic would have been an advancement over most organizations today. Involving everyone in the decision making process is a rare thing these days, but something that must be pursued both as an end in itself and something that people instinctively appreciate. Second, by involving everyone, the steering committee could have increased the variety of viewpoints, the number of concrete suggestions and thereby the number of successful actions. The blockade would have been constituted by those who actually created its strategy, as opposed to mere observers. Thirdly, by increasing the blockaders' involvement in making the decisions, the leadership could have increased their commitment to the struggle and their enthusiasm for taking action. If people feel they have some control over an action, they are more willing to sacrifice, take risks to make it succeed. Democracy in an action is a way to make that action stronger.

Of course, the attraction of undemocratic strategies today is very great. Because there are not other popular movements toward which to turn for additional support, leaderships like the one at Columbia see popular mobilization and confrontation with the establishment as especially risky and threatening to themselves. What made the situation worse, moreover, was that the leaderships of the Black community and the trade unions were even more reluctant to mobilize the ranks than were the Columbia leaders. The nature of the outside support which came from the Harlem community, the trade unions and the local politicians reflected the current hesitation towards mass action.

Individual members of the Black community did offer a huge amount of verbal and material backing. Community members came out to support the blockade in any way they could—cooking, donating money, leafletting, and just sitting out with the blockaders. Unfortunately, the leadership of the Harlem community did not actually *organize* their constituencies to give the blockade more backing. It would have been great to have a Black community blockade support committee to take charge of spreading the word and bringing people out for the demonstrations and marches.

The trade union leaderships were even less forthcoming. With the exception of District 65, which is organized on campus, the city unions gave little backing in action. There were plenty of messages of solidarity, monetary donations and calls for students to support labor. But the trade union leaderships did nothing to mobilize their members in support of the blockade. It might sound a bit far-fetched these days to ask labor to act in concert with students, but it happened at Berkeley. There, the students set up picket lines and Teamsters and Federal Express workers refused to cross them. To suggest that something similar could have happened in New York does not seem unreasonable, especially in the trade unions which have predominantly Black memberships. The links between Black South Africans and American Black trade unionists have been crucial to the divestment movement, especially because of the very big role of Black trade unions in the South African freedom struggle. Black workers are deeply concerned about the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa. In New York, it would be possible for

Black workers to organize themselves in support committees. Certainly, they came out to support the blockade. For example, about 100 members of local 420 of AFSCME marched onto campus led by Jim Larkin's "We're fired up, won't take no more." Along with a couple of other unions, they lent their numbers to the blockade for two afternoon rallies, including the one at which Jesse Jackson spoke. A union support committee to spread the word in the work places, and possibly to organize in Harlem, would have been a possible further step. Unfortunately, neither the steering committee nor labor bureaucracies ever considered it.

By coming to the blockade, labor leaders, democratic politicians and religious leaders gave a show of being active to their constituencies. However, talking and acting are very different things. These leaders were able to use the blockade to advance their own reputations without risking their positions by taking a possibly unsuccessful action.

## Divestment: A Socialist Perspective

How divestment is going to be fought for and won is crucial for the revival of militant mass struggle in the U.S. Today the struggle for divestment has gone far beyond a few students in their university governments. It is involving a large number of people in mass, and often militant, anti-establishment action. The movement's message pulls people in easily, and makes it less difficult for them to take strong action. We should encourage this, for, it will not only make the struggle itself stronger. It will open the way for getting crucial ideas across and making important political links. What are some of these ideas and what are some of the links which can be made?

There is nothing wrong with starting with the moral position that most people hold when they enter the struggle. Apartheid is wrong. Period. By beginning here, we can begin to challenge some of the directions the struggle has already taken, which tend to lead the movement back in the direction of the establishment and passivity. For example, by bringing out the moral issues involved, we can begin to challenge the very idea of holding technical discussion on how to find equally profitable alternative investments for universities and companies when they divest. Like slavery, apartheid is simply not an acceptable form of socio-economic organization, and no type of support for it is justifiable, no matter how profitable. We should demand the withdrawal of all support to apartheid no matter what the costs to those doing business there. It is not our business to protect the profits of American corporations and institutions. To allow the question of divestment to hinge on whether or not it is possible to find alternative investments as profitable as those connected with South Africa is implicitly to accept the idea that high levels of profitability justify support for apartheid. If we can begin to get across this point, we will be in a better position to argue against those student, faculty and consultant committees concerning themselves with what to do about university investments after divestment takes place. Our job is to achieve divestment, that's the point of the struggle. It is not our job to decide how the universities are going to invest.

If moral outrage is a place to start, we cannot stop there. The obvious next step is to point out that the maintenance of the apartheid system is no accident. It



## Against the Current

is part and parcel of capitalism today. Various sectors of world capital make huge profits in South Africa. It is a key source of many of those minerals most critical to capitalism's functioning (gold, coal, uranium, etc.) and a huge field for investment in industry. It is also a politico-military stronghold for imperialism on the African continent. That is why most of the advanced capitalist governments have tolerated, if not (like the United States) actively backed South Africa's brutal white rulers.

On the other hand, the struggle in South Africa is not primarily a question of another third world people fighting for liberation from colonial oppression. South Africa is an advanced capitalist country with a large working class. It is this working class that holds the social power capable of overthrowing apartheid. That means trade unions and other forms of working class self organization in South Africa are the greatest threat to the apartheid regime. As part of the struggle for divestment and against apartheid in the United States, we should support these working class organizations in particular, and bring their struggles to the fore. A good example of this: as the miners go on strike in South Africa, support committees are beginning to be formed. They are raising money and alerting people, mostly trade unionists and Blacks, to the fightback in South Africa. Bringing out the working class aspect of the South Africa struggle should be perhaps our top priority.

Another way to bring a working class perspective to the divestment struggle is to take it off campus, directly to the multinational corporations that do business in and with South Africa. Picket lines and demonstrations at factories and corporate headquarters put pressure on the giants to withdraw support for apartheid. Media exposure can also help to embarrass these companies; they are sensitive to their public image, and we can use this against them (although we should guard against becoming consumed by a focus on the media). This tactic also can educate the employees of these corporations who often do not know their companies support apartheid. It is these workers who could ultimately force their companies to divest.

There are a number of other links that can be made to broaden and politicize the divestment struggle. One connection, which began with the April 20th demonstration in Washington, is with the anti-imperialist, anti-intervention struggle. The inconsistencies of Reagan's foreign policy are obvious. The slogan "Embargo against South Africa, not Nicaragua" is already becoming popular, and we must continue to juxtapose the one with the other. The point is that today the two struggles are not only united by the fact that both are against reactionary forces supported by the United States; they are already being brought together in practice. Both struggles are fast becoming the foci of what, at this moment, is basically a unified fight against the Reagan administration and its policies. But by showing that Reagan's policies have deep roots in the needs of imperialism today and, for this reason, have been supported by both Republicans and Democrats alike, we can begin to give the movement an anti-capitalist character. In this way, we can actually help people gain confidence in their ability to fight back on a whole range of issues, because they will begin to see that all of

the issues with which they are concerned—anti-intervention, militarism, the cuts in government spending, the decay of industry, and unemployment, as well as apartheid in South Africa—are systematically related... and can therefore unite people in common struggle, rather than confine them in separate interest groups. Organizing further national demonstrations demanding U.S. out of South Africa and Central America is a way to continue the politicization process begun on April 20.

Probably the greatest opportunity to broaden the divestment movement lies in anti-racist action. South Africa is already an important issue for many Blacks. This is, in part, because the struggle that Black South Africans face is a magnified version of the struggle of Black Americans. Blacks in American cities are still fighting against a racist system for decent housing, better education, proper healthcare and, most importantly, jobs. Often, it is the same institution that owns their tenements and stock in Anglo-American. Or, it is the same company that lays them off and moves to South Africa to set up shop.

Columbia University is the perfect example of the links which exist and which need to be struggled against. It is the third largest landowner in the city of New York. It employs thousands of mostly Black and Latino staff. And it provides healthcare to Blacks through its medical facilities in Washington Heights. As of this writing, two Black women tenants of Columbia are desperately fighting evictions. The staff at Columbia just won a four-year unionization battle and may be about to go on strike. Columbia represents the system in microcosm. The movement for divestment should be linked with union battles, tenant struggles, campaigns against racist hiring policies and student, faculty and staff participation. Already, participants in each of these struggles at Columbia are moving to help organize the other struggles. A new organizational form needs to be constructed to coordinate the activities of these different movements, and to concentrate their power. Such an organization could bring together the diverse activities on campus and off, and magnify the effectiveness of them all. It could, moreover, enable a much more powerful body to put the demands of all of the movements together directly to the university.

Finally, no matter which links are made and no matter which issues are taken up, the necessary condition for success is mass direct action. Although the specific tactic chosen will of course vary with the situation, in every case, it is critical to use the most democratic and open form in order to encourage mass participation and self-organization. This is the only way to build the power to win and, at the same time, to open up people to the ideas of socialism. ■

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The Columbia University Board of Trustees voted to divest on October 9, 1985. Columbia president Michael Sovern claimed the blockade had nothing to do with the decision. He pointed to events in South Africa. Without doubt, however, the decision reflects the power of the American divestment struggle to weaken support for apartheid and the strength of Black South Africans to end it.



As part of our appreciation of the life and work of Steve Zeluck, we are reprinting one of his last political articles. The subject of the essay, the development of Lenin's conception of the party and its relation to the tasks of constructing a revolutionary organization in the US today, was one of Steve's central concerns during his last decade of political activity. In many ways, this essay provides the theoretical foundation for Steve's energetic pursuit of a revolutionary Marxist regroupment in the US.

For Steve, Lenin's conception of the party was the result of a historical and theoretical production process. In other words, Lenin's ideas were not "revealed truths," which suddenly emerged in an unalterable form in 1903. Instead, they were the product of conscious involvement in, and contemplation of the living class struggle. Thus, Lenin accepted the Kautskian notion of an "all-inclusive" working class party until the beginning of the first world war. It required the "orthodox marxists" (Kautsky, et al.) betrayal of international socialism in 1914 for Lenin to realize the need for a separate organization of revolutionary workers and intellectuals.

From this conception of the Leninist party as the special organization of the "organic intelligentsia" of the working class, Steve was able to grasp the necessity of a revolutionary Marxist regroupment in the U.S. Steve clearly realized that there is no "party" in the US today. None of the existing scattered revolutionary cadre and unorganized revolutionaries have the material resources nor the relation to the working class needed to either effect the class struggle nor elaborate a strategic perspective in the US. Only a regroupment, on the basis of a common revolutionary program and practice, would allow revolutionary socialists to begin to overcome this situation. On the one hand, a regroupment would provide revolutionaries with the "critical mass" needed to effectively intervene in certain arenas of the class struggle and social movements. On the other hand, a regroupment would allow us to share our partial experiences and strategic insights in political discussion and debate aimed toward elaborating a strategic perspective for the US.

Finally, Steve's conception of Leninism and his party-building perspective for the contemporary US led him to emphasize the centrality of socialist democracy in revolutionary organizations. The freest discussion of differences, and all that it entails (rights of minorities to organize within the organization, to publish their views in the organization's press, to discuss differences with sympathizers, etc.), are both unavoidable and necessary. Only the "corrective of differences" allows us to overcome the effects of heterogeneity of the working class and its vanguard, the isolation of full-time leaders, and the limitations of our partial experiences and knowledge.

We hope that the publication of this essay will encourage a renewed discussion of these questions and aid the actual process of revolutionary Marxist regroupment in the US. The editors of ATC encourage our readers to send us their comments and criticisms.

# The Evolution of Lenin's Views on the Party Or, Lenin on Regroupment

by Steve Zeluck

**I**t is customary to start any discussion of socialist organization with some references to Lenin, or Gramsci, or Mao, or sometimes even Debs. That will not be our point of entry, even to an article about Lenin, in part because the situation in the U.S. and its Left today makes another starting point more useful.

If the growing movement or mood for socialist regroupment is to go anywhere, it must certainly face up to the fact that at least one of the sources of the Left's suicidal fragmentation has been of the Left's own making. I refer of course to the bureaucratic elitist organizational practices, norms and theories of most revolutionary organizations today. Democratic practice is not a question of making a virtue of necessity (to facilitate regroupment), but is the core of a revolutionary socialist organization, just as democracy is at the heart of any effective socialist economy.

Lenin's name has often been invoked to justify revolutionary organizations' departures from democracy. This kind of "Leninism" ignores the real evolution of Lenin's thought about the party. In what follows, I suggest that: 1) until late in his political career Lenin did not have a "Leninist" vanguard theory (commonly attributed to him as of 1902), in the sense in which it is understood today. Until 1914 he had an essentially Kautskian view of the party. 2) This conflict between the Kautskian party model and Lenin's politics caused him and the movement no end of confusion and trouble. 3) Lenin's

"democratic centralism" was not at all what it was (is) supposed to be. 4) Lenin's views evolved even while lacking a theoretical foundation for that evolution (until 1914).

## The Kautskian Party

Lenin, like almost all leaders of the Russian party, was a committed follower of Karl Kautsky, the German "pope of Marxism". Hence he refused to support Rosa Luxemburg's criticism of Kautsky within the German Social Democratic Party, or to believe in Kautsky's betrayal in 1914, when Kautsky supported German imperialism in World War I. Lenin insisted the newspaper copy that reported Kautsky's stand was a forgery. This commitment made it impossible for Lenin to recognize the merits of Luxemburg's critique of social democracy. His confidence in Kautsky's revolutionary credentials was bolstered by the fact that Kautsky supported Lenin's theoretical views against the Mensheviks on the source of the revolution to come in Russia. Kautsky, too, thought it would be a bourgeois revolution

carried out by workers and peasants independent of the capitalists. (Collected Works, Vol. 10, p. 359) For Lenin, the party of Kautsky and Bebel was a revolutionary workers party. He could hardly have felt this way and rejected Kautsky's party model (for Lenin that could only have meant open criticism). That this is not mere conjecture is easily demonstrated.

Kautsky, like Marx and Engels, believed in a party which embraced (in principle) the whole class. A full quarter of all the votes for the German SDP came from party members. It was a party which included a wide range of views, reformist and revolutionary (like the American Kautskian party, the Socialist Party USA, with its own heroic Bebel in the person of Eugene Debs.) This model remains the organizational principle, advocated in the US today by parts of Democratic Socialists of America. The problem of working class socialist reformism was never fully faced up to by Kautsky or the founding fathers of the socialist movement. Believing as he did in the theory, of immiseration of the working class under capitalism, Kautsky saw the working class as fairly uniformly (though not in its entirety) moving to socialist revolution under the party's leadership. The resulting mass movement, he believed, would curb and even save most reformist-tending individuals and groups. (Cliff, p. 278) The widely shared theory of capitalism's inevitable collapse contributed to this variant of "revolutionary optimism."

Kautsky believed that the party intellectuals' role was to bring socialist theory and consciousness to workers. Alone, the workers were capable only of trade union consciousness. Finally, the SDP was seen as a vanguard, like any party, in the sense that it represented a class or fraction of one. The party was the stratum which by inclination separated out and organized an ideology and strategy, i.e., did the political work of the class for it. (Even DSA is a vanguard of sorts, though a vanguard sect!) The SDP was a vanguard, to Lenin also, by virtue of the fact that it, too, was an expression of the unevenness of workers' consciousness and commitment.

### Lenin as a Kautskian

Until 1914, Lenin, too, believed in the party of the class as a whole. Consequently, the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party, and Lenin, constantly fought for a united party which included both revolutionists and reformists. The Bolsheviks' insistence that they were just a faction was no fiction. Lenin and Plekhanov also shared the Kautskian doctrine which, they thought, ensured the victory of the revolutionary current in the party: both accepted the immiseration thesis and believed that rejection of this thesis would inevitably lead to reformism and opportunism. (See 1903 Congress Minutes and Collected Works, Vol. 18, p. 435-6). It is not surprising that Lenin, holding this view believed that the intellectuals were the source of reformism in the party. The task was then to curb them, and use them—for Lenin shared, at least in 1902, Kautsky's view of the positive aspects of the intellectuals as well.

Of course, to say the Russians were Kautskians is just a start. For Lenin, and many Mensheviks too, at least for a time, the Kautskian model had to be adapted for the repressive regime and the illegal conditions of work. Kautsky certainly approved such adaptations of his the-

ory, in principle.

What adaptations? Lenin's first try was expressed in the Bolshevik faction model in effect between 1902-05. In the name of security, the party in practice seldom worked on the electoral principle. It was the time of the committeeman. Activists, leaders, entire committees were coopted from above. Workers were, in practice, not encouraged to be part of the cadre of full-time professional revolutionaries. In short, Lenin advocated a highly elitist, unabashedly military model which aroused the opposition of Kautsky, Luxemburg, and Trotsky, not to speak of the Mensheviks.

But Lenin's adaptations were adaptations, nevertheless, and not a break with the democratic elitist party of Kautsky. So it is not surprising that Lenin continued through all this to try to build a united party with those who opposed his organizational and political views. And when Lenin balked at times, tactically, he was often overruled by his organization. The Lenin of 1902 was then not a vanguardist in the sense we know today. If his organization bore a resemblance to one, it was on tactical, empirical grounds with no political rationale (as yet).

### 1905

Underground organization, like guerrilla warfare, contains inherently severe risks for any non-putschist group, especially one that sees the working class as a forger of its own future. For clandestinity tends to make a movement narrow and rigid in comparison to an open party. An underground party cannot be broadly based (though a support movement may). And indeed, the party even comes under great pressure to limit rank and file initiative for fear of the unanticipated effects on the entire organization. Similarly, the unavoidable centralism creates an immense tension with a mass movement with its own dynamic. (Nevertheless, there was, and is, a powerful tendency among many "Leninists" to make a virtue of necessity, imposing the Russian underground norms on the Russia of 1905, not to speak of the U.S. today.)

How much these dangers are avoidable, and how much Lenin's organizational practices contributed to intensifying these dangers, is another subject. But for whatever reason, Lenin's organization, the organization he built, was a radical failure when put to the test in 1905. (Though the Bolsheviks were saved from the worst consequences in the long run by their revolutionary Jacobin determination, and by the even worse political and organizational failures of their rivals, the Mensheviks.) The Bolsheviks had a sectarian abstentionist line to the mass unions organized by Zubatov (a police agent). The Bolshevik committeemen, sure that they and the party alone could lead and the masses could only follow, opposed the central expression of the 1905 revolution—the soviet. They told it—take our program and leadership, or else... They were promptly and properly isolated. It was Trotsky, their revolutionary critic, and not a Bolshevik, who became the leader of the soviet. The same elements in the Bolshevik faction bitterly resisted any democratization of the party or recruitment of workers. Chickens come home to roost. (Parallel dogmatic errors were to occur in 1917 prior to Lenin's return to Russia.) It took all of Lenin's authority



to force a change in these politics, but it was belated, and only after a bitter struggle.

As society approached a more democratic climate, i.e., one in which the Czarist state could not arbitrarily exercise its repressive intents, another Lenin appeared. Instead of a working class limited to union consciousness, Lenin now spoke of a working class with instinctive socialist strivings; the spontaneous (i.e., independent of any party) self-mobilization of the masses was recognized. Now the committeeman model was no longer "indispensable" but was counter-productive. The party was now to be made of 99% workers who could hardly be professional revolutionists, and yet had to be able, and were able, to make policy. (See below, and Cliff, Lieberman p. 31-2.) How much this was a "correction" leading to a more interdependent, mutually fertilizing relation of party to class, and how much was just recognition of the new possibilities implicit in an open political situation is difficult to say.

But the events of 1906 do tell us for the first time what Lenin's views of a party under normal, legal or semi-legal conditions were, at that time. For early 1906, a brief moment of Czarist democracy, was the setting of a congress of the RSDLP. At this convention, when the party had 135,000 members, the term democratic centralism made its first appearance. The need for centralism (the extent depending on the degree of illegality and the state of struggle) was then not questioned by anyone, including the Mensheviks (a majority at this congress). What is forgotten however is the context and meaning of the term at that time. The term in fact embodied a criticism of Lenin. He had been under sharp attack for excessive centralism bordering on authoritarianism. The term, democratic centralism, was born then as a corrective of Lenin, as seen by the majority. (Lenin himself may not have seen it that way, but as a new form for new circumstances. In fact the near unanimous resolution was incorporated in the minutes at Lenin's request.)

The focus of the resolution was on democratic centralism. Concretely, what did this concept mean then? First, it continued the Kautskian perspective of a united multi-tendency party (reformist and revolutionary); the principle of elected officials and committees, not appointed from the center; the principle of recall of all elected officers. (Collected Works, Vol. 10, p. 376) In addition, Lenin recognized the need to involve the ranks in decision making over and beyond party conventions. This took the form of approving and carrying out membership referenda on policy (Collected Works, Vol. 11, p. 434-8); the rights of factions and tendencies to publish their own material and the obligation of the party leadership to circulate these publications; recognition of the importance of local initiatives and self-government; the impermissibility of executive bodies imposing "self-discipline" so that differences among them could be kept from the ranks. (Indeed, in any party with deep roots among the masses, neither leadership opinions nor "for-members-only" opinions can be withheld from the public (not to speak of the FBI) in practice (if only because it is impossible), but must be out in the open (security apart). (Vol. 13, p. 159, Cliff p. 269)) Finally, Lenin supported the right of party members to criticize party policy and analyses in the party's public press and

at public meetings. (Vol. 10, p. 442-3) This was in no way inconsistent with "unity in action," for critiques had to be suspended when a definite action was in process. (So much for that parody which passes for Leninism today.)

With one vital exception (below), this was the model of the Leninist party (within the limits of changing degrees of legality), which governed the actual practice of the Bolshevik party by 1917. It prevailed even through the hectic revolutionary period which (at first "Leninist" blush) one would think could have justified a far more "centralist," from the top down, mode of operation.

The 1906 unity was short-lived. As the political situation in the country deteriorated and repression gained the upper hand, the political differences within the united organization sharpened. Ultra-left and opportunist currents grew. The unity of the Bolshevik faction itself was broken by the emergence of a current against participation in elections to the Duma. In fact, at the 1907 Congress, Lenin was a minority in his faction on this issue and the vote to participate in the elections was only carried by his alliance with the Mensheviks against his own group. At the same time, among the Mensheviks, a tendency toward closer collaboration with the bourgeois liberals brought more and more members to reject the need for an illegal party (or the need for any revolutionary party on the immediate agenda). These were the "liquidationists." The centrifugal forces were so great that the factions soon fell into their quasi-independent mode of activity.

In this situation, a small group headed by Trotsky (and backed by Kautsky) tried to conciliate and breach the growing chasm. Lenin's problem was that however clearly he saw the differences between the groups, he was also still prisoner of the Kautskian model of a party of the class as a whole. As a result it was difficult to retain a principled objection to unity. Consequently, in January 1910 a (last) attempt was made. The two principal factions agreed to dissolve, surrender their funds and property, and jointly condemned both the ultra-lefts and the opportunist liquidators. Participation in parliamentary elections (and other legal opportunities) was confirmed, as was the need for an illegal party. All other differences remained unresolved, but acceptable. Hence there was room for Plekhanov who was, theoretically, the most right-wing pro-bourgeois leader in the party (but was for maintaining an illegal party). In short, there was still no Leninist vanguard party.

The truce lasted for a matter of weeks. All are agreed that the Mensheviks broke it and that was the end. From this point on, Lenin never agreed to unity talks. Instead, he forged a de-facto non-principled (not unprincipled) exclusively revolutionary organization. He still did not justify the break primarily on political grounds (the need for an unambiguously revolutionary vanguard organization which would exclude reformists) but on the organizational ground that Mensheviks were not to be trusted to keep their word—that they were incapable of breaking with the liquidationist wing of their group (which represented the real logic of Menshevik politics).

## Out of the Kautskian Shell

But Lenin was still not a "Leninist." From 1910 to 1914 his organizational independence from the Men-

sheviks remained based chiefly on organization, not principled grounds. For he still believed that intellectuals were the real source of opportunism and reformism. The theory of immiseration seemed to support the thesis that reformism was not a problem of the working class itself. (England was the great exception.)

It took Kautsky's 1914 betrayal to destroy this framework essential to revolutionary Kautskian doctrine, both politically and organizationally. For the first time Lenin had to face the fact that reformism is more than a matter of intellectuals and party bureaucrats. He found an explanation in his theory of monopoly capital, imperialism, and the presumed existence of a labor aristocracy. As this became clear to him, the theoretical basis was laid for Lenin to emerge from his Kautskian shell both politically and organizationally, and break with the Mensheviks of all varieties and nationalities on principle. The theoretical basis was now laid for two (or more) parties of the working class—basically its reformist and revolutionary wings. One of them was the "true" vanguard of the workers' revolution.

And that is "all" the Leninist vanguard theory is—the need for a party, but a party of the revolutionary wing of the workers' movement. There was no prejudgment of the vanguard's being inherently a minority of the workers; the Bolsheviks were a majority of the workers' movement by 1912. Even in a non-revolutionary period, the revolutionary wing can be the majority. (But in the event of being a minority, the United Front tactic becomes the central corollary for work.) Nor is this vanguard defined as monolithic, "only" revolutionary.

But is that "all?" Yes, with the addition that since form follows function, a revolutionary party is naturally organized along different lines than a reformist electoral party. It is necessarily more democratic than a social democratic party, and, because it is more democratic, it is, can be, openly, unabashedly, "disciplined," i.e. it respects real majority rule in action. (Whereas a social democratic organization—like a bourgeois party—can and normally does vote one policy "democratically" at a congress, while the leadership acts another way in practice.) Beyond these elementary corollaries, the actual organizational content and norms of the revolutionary party will vary with the situation, national peculiarities, the stage of development of the revolutionary organization, and the level of class struggle.

We cannot here review the many stages and phases of Lenin's organizational practice. But we can look briefly at the organizational norms followed by Lenin at times which are most like our own, i.e., in 1906 and 1917 when the party was legal, and the working class in motion. When one does so, doubts tend to evaporate. In 1906, the party norms he supported included the use of referenda, the right of minorities to publish and openly differ with the "party line," etc.) As for 1917, that situation is more widely appreciated. All party differences, and there were many, were openly debated in the public press. Party congresses to set policy were held every few months (even though in a revolutionary period, in a rapidly changing scene, one could easily have expected an argument for fewer meetings). Going to the ranks over the head of the leadership was almost a norm.

But if a revolutionary party not only need not, but must not be monolithic, then the door opens to a viable, principled, regrouped revolutionary movement.

## Revolutionary Democracy

Lenin's name has often been invoked to justify revolutionary organizations' departures from democracy. This kind of "Leninism" ignores the real evolution of Lenin's thought about the party.

Strange as it may seem to some, a revolutionary socialist organization must by its very nature, i.e. by virtue of its tasks and goals, be the most democratic organization conceivable (even more so than the fabled soviet democracy of 1917). This is in marked fundamental opposition to the character of social democratic, electoralist organizations which by their very nature cannot be democratic in more than form. (They can also lack discipline, as we know very well.) A party geared primarily to accomplishing its goals through elections does not need, or usually want, an activist cadre, except at election time, and perhaps not even then, given the role of TV, etc. (In the Democratic Party, successful candidates often have their own machinery and cadre to which the party cadres are subordinate.) The life of an electoralist party is dominated by routine, a passive membership which is, therefore, inevitably, relatively uninformed. "Informed" decision-making is done by the party apparatus (or an outside parallel apparatus in the U.S.), irrespective of party platforms. The structure is therefore organically elitist, substitutionist and independent of the members no matter how democratic the organization may be, or appear to be, formally.

By contrast, a revolutionary workers' organization, despite its need for "undemocratic" discipline, in fact requires the most profound party democracy if its goal is really workers' power, and not some agency or group ruling for workers, in "their interest." For workers' power, a party needs above all the ability to relate to the spontaneous outbursts of the masses. It needs the feedback which only an independent, educated rank and file can bring to the party to correct the inevitable errors—errors compounded by the fact that the apparatus leadership is inevitably to some degree isolated from reality. It is this relation of party and class, this reciprocal interaction between the masses and their party(s), which is the key to revolutionary politics. This means that the party ranks have to be, or aim to become, what Gramsci spoke of as "organic intellectuals," workers who overcome the division between manual and mental labor. Aiding this metamorphosis is a central task of revolutionary leadership. For without such a cadre, democratic control of the party and revolution by the working class, not "for" it, are in fact impossible. Without such cadre, no leadership group or party can play its part in the revolutionary process.

In one sense, Stalinism can be traced to the defeat and physical destruction and/or demoralization of part of this all-important stratum of the party in the gruesome period of the civil war, and the absorption of most of the rest into the bureaucratic state apparatus. (Later this was compounded by the conscious dilution of the party through the sudden, factional admission of several hundred thousand people with relatively low level of awareness, much less commitment.)

The need for party democracy has equally deep roots of a prefigurative character. The object of the revolution is to pass from the realm of necessity to the realm of freedom. The very existence or coming into existence of a revolutionary party, whose consciousness transcends



the present and links us all to the future world of freedom, is a fragmentary anticipation of that world. In a parallel way, individual relations and relations of the party as a whole to individual members, have to consciously strive to make the process of decision-making today pre-figure, as much as possible, those we want to build under socialism. For comradeship in politics is a special case of true friendship no less intense, binding or encompassing. In this sense, then, the forging of a real party cadre on a mass scale (and a non-mass revolutionary party is inconceivable in the U.S.) is one facet of the creation within the working class, under capitalism, of the working class to come before it dissolves itself into "society at large."

It goes without saying that the forms through which these conceptions are expressed will vary with the circumstances, history, tradition, stage of the class struggle and state of the socialist movement. Nevertheless, there must be express organizational norms before the departures necessitated by circumstances can be considered or justified.

**ORGANIZATIONAL NORMS AND PRINCIPLES** that follow from the necessary democratic character of a revolutionary working class organization:

1) A cadre organization: an organization of non-activist, mere dues-payers cannot be democratic.

2) Right of tendencies to form and maintain themselves at all times. The socialist organization operates on the democratic principle that self-correction will be a continuing necessity. This means that a healthy respect for minorities is seen as a guarantor of the party's future ability to correct its errors. It means, too, the awareness that every majority starts out as a minority.

3) Right of women, gays, Blacks, Hispanics to organize caucuses within the party. These caucuses are quite distinct from the Women's Commissions (and others) which organize the party's work among various milieus. They exist to develop the individuals, their self-confidence, and to defend the rights of women (et al) inside the organization.

4) Guarantee of at least proportional representation to all political minorities (who declare themselves) on all national bodies.

5) Guarantee of gender and people of color representation on all bodies.

6) The discussion bulletins of the organization shall be available to the interested public and open to all viewpoints within the party at all times.

7) Right to publicly differ with the views of the party majority shall not be infringed upon.

8) Maximum involvement of membership in decision making. Modern communication technology makes such involvement easier even on a national scale; referenda can be considered as a means of determining policy; policy should be set in the branches by the membership, not by executive, administrative bodies.

9) Relation of the party ranks to the leadership: a democratic organization does not obviate the need for a role for leadership within an organization. Good leadership is an asset no organization can dispense with. But leadership carries its problems and dangers as well. The party leadership inevitably tends toward a bureaucratic apparatus mode of functioning. It is an apparatus with routinist, often conservative, tendencies, influenced by

the prevalent legalism and by its own needs. It is often a technical elite of editors, publicists, organizers with their own fragmenting division of labor, as a result of which they tend to be isolated from the mass movement and have a connection with it only through the party cadre within the movements. The leadership, often more theoretically advanced than the ranks, simultaneously suffers from the disadvantage of theory—a tendency to rigidity and inflexibility in the face of concrete reality. This rigidity is compounded in small organizations by the fact that at some point, often a prolonged period of time, it may be necessary to defend a minority and usually untestable theory.

The Bolshevik party leadership gave repeated examples of these tendencies in situations of the gravest importance. In 1905, as we know, Lenin's apparatus cadre missed the significance of the soviets. In 1917, the leadership advised against the women's strike which precipitated the February revolution. And when the revolution broke out over their heads, they resisted deepening the revolutionary process (because their theory that the revolution would be a bourgeois revolution set limits to the tasks they set for themselves, initially). It took Lenin's mobilization of the party ranks against the leadership to reverse these policies.

Some of the organizational means of combating the above would be: (a) the minutes of all meetings of all bodies should be available to all members. The minutes should include a record of the votes of all members of those bodies. A climate must exist in which the members of all bodies recognize their primary responsibility is not to the committee, but to the membership. (b) The weight of full-time functionaries on leading bodies should be minimized. (c) Consideration should be given to means for insuring a rotation of tasks and a rotation in and out of the party apparatus, for the good of the party and the individuals.

10) If democracy points to the importance of minority rights for the safety and health of the entire party, democracy also, of course, addresses the question of majority rights. Majority rights imply more than just the majority's right to carry out its policy. In a movement which is engaged in action, not just deliberation or legislation, and not just a discussion club, the question inevitably arises when and how the majority may insist that the minority carry out the will of the majority. Forgotten sometimes is the fact that the majority's ability to carry out its policy often, normally, requires minority acquiescence in practice. If the minority is to expect its rights and concerns to be respected, it must recognize the right of the majority to implement its policy and not be obstructed in its course. (It goes without saying that we are referring here to actions, not policies or views, though of course the distinction between the two is not always easy to demarcate, just as the administration of policy often ends up in practice in the making of policy.)

The traditional formulation of "majority rights" is usually cast in terms of "discipline." Discipline, i.e., the support of the majority in actions, is, however, impossible to realize unless the cadre's, i.e. the membership's, training and life is democratic in the sense delineated above. Discipline is only attainable if it is internal, self-imposed, if the members agree (not just submit) to be

disciplined—an agreement which will come if minorities feel that the organization's structure is such as to allow them to become a majority; if the minority has sufficient confidence in and regard for the organization's membership and leaders; if they feel these feelings are reciprocated, and if they are confident that they have genuine input into making the decision or into reversing them, i.e., if genuinely free discussion exists at every moment till the actual moment of action.

But even majority rights "in actions" are limited, hardly an absolute. For one, a wise majority will not always insist upon its rights. For example, if it is a "mere" majority. Similarly, there will be times when minorities will and should be allowed to act as they perceive necessary. For example, there were differences among us in Workers Power on whether to participate in the Citizens Party. One can imagine a minority, at least for a time, being allowed to relate (or not to relate) to the Citizens Party without producing a crisis in the organization. Or, we are reminded by Myra Weiss, a former leader of the SWP, that in 1946 (to take one case of importance), the SWP in Los Angeles was responsible for getting the L.A. labor movement to stop the fascist, Gerald K. Smith. A minority of the party felt that the strategy would fail, and insisted on another course—organizing a united front of the left and progressives. The minority acted on its views, and its action was not "viewed with alarm," nor did it provoke any crisis.

Apart from "discipline" there is a second expression of the unique feature of a revolutionary socialist organization which leads socialists to conceive of their party as an army. We are all well aware of the care with which analogies must be treated—the ease with which they can imperceptibly change from analogies to identities. In this case, the analogy has in the past often provided the rationale for many anti-democratic practices, all in the name of the fact that we are conducting a class war, and that we are a party of action, not talk. But the possible misuse of a conception does not alone justify disposing of it. It merely suggests that we must proceed with caution, keeping in mind the limits of analogies.

In one sense, of course, our revolutionary goals make the army analogy credible. But it cannot be forgotten that the army we speak of is unique—a democratic army, an army more democratic than civilian society.

Secondly, there are various moments in the life of any army—peace time and war. This applies to our "democratic army" as well. After all, the class struggle passes through different stages, ranging from the "war of maneuver" to a "war of position," from that slogging day-to-day struggle in which socialists and workers try to attain hegemony in society, to those other moments in which the struggle reaches a moment of crisis. Today, we are trying to lay the basis (it would be delusional to think we are or can be doing more) for organization in which the movement is waging, for the most part, a war of position (skirmishes might be closer to reality) and not yet a war of maneuver.

The army analogy has still another implicit consequence, a regrettable one. In its name are justified relations among comrades which are in fact devoid of comradeship and often even simple human considerations. The "tough" army analogy only reinforces the competitive, manipulative relations inherent in capital-

ism which are compounded by patriarchal male-female relations. Consequently, relations and methods of work and discussion within the socialist organization have all too often been hierarchical, characterized by fiercely polemical exchanges, a reluctance to give comrades the benefit of the doubt—all of which can be personally very destructive.

### Democracy and the Law of Diminishing Size

The revolutionary left has, as we all know, exhibited a suicidal tendency to split. Some of the reasons are understandable. A small group is constantly faced with the pressures from the "narcissism of small differences." Lacking the gravitational centripetal force of a large party, with ties to the working class which cannot be easily reconstructed or severed, lacking this cement, differences which all too often cannot be tested in action, differences which are tactical in nature, not to speak of personality conflicts and ambition (which are especially devastating for small groups), all combine to exert enormous pressures for splits. After all, we are told, the resulting groups are seldom qualitatively smaller, so "what difference does it make," especially since the promised gains-to-come are not just the advantage of a "purer" more "correct" line, but the alleged certainty of a real "breakthrough" on the basis of that correct line.

But these pressures, these psychologically powerful reasons, have been perversely compounded by a practice of our own making, a practice which (in the name of Leninism) justified authoritarian, monolithic, anti-democratic policies and practices which encouraged and accelerated the all too real centrifugal tendencies. The net result of all these has been that the left is characterized by a seeming law of diminishing size. Divide and multiply seems to be the rule, and in the process revolutionary left propaganda groups have passed over into irrelevant monolithic sects.

The rejection of this model of socialist organization and its replacement by a conception of a genuinely democratic revolutionary organization along lines such as those above is an indispensable precondition for a stable, united organization. It would permit us to project a regrouped revolutionary current in the U.S., which will have the capacity to integrate with and cross-fertilize with workers' political formations of an embryonically revolutionary character (which would even characterize a Labor Party under certain conditions). The potential for playing such a role depends on the degree to which such an organization can develop at least some of the theory needed for an American revolution, and, inseparable from that very possibility, build rudimentary organic ties to the working class through intervention in its daily struggles. Even for this modest task, a regrouped socialist organization is indispensable.

On the other hand, rejection of a democratic model of a socialist organization has actually had demonstrable reactionary consequences. The recent history of the SWP is only the latest case in point. Its blindness to the problems of Third World revolutions and its uncritical stance toward them is undoubtedly related to the SWP's own bureaucratic conceptions of a socialist organization. ■





# WOMEN WRITERS OF THE LEFT

**Le Sueur,  
Piercy  
and  
Lessing**

by Nora R. Wainer\*

**D**espite the end of the McCarthy era and the rise of a leftish sort of movement among intellectuals, there has not been a major increase in the number of left-wing novelists. Thus it is even more curious that the left-wing writers there are, if they are women, tend to be regarded only as feminists, while their politics—which may well be the stuff of their lives—are ignored.

I am thinking of Meridel Le Sueur, Doris Lessing and Marge Piercy as prime exponents of three generations of feminine leftism and frankly I am amazed. All three are touted by both literary press and women's journals for the things they have to say about women: how they get along with men, how they manage children, jobs, careers, other women as friends and lovers, and so forth.

Nowhere is their radicalism—from early thirties communism to sixties SDS—regarded as the mainspring of their writing.

Meridel Le Sueur, her communist writings of the twenties and thirties eclipsed by McCarthyism, has now had her work reissued by the Feminist Press of Old Westbury, with the promise that her compassion for other women, poor for the most part, will appeal to modern feminist readers—even those who may not cotton to her communist proletarian realism. Yet Le Sueur was first and foremost a communist intellectual—participant in the Minneapolis Truckers strike of 1934, and

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standee on many a bread line. Certainly we care about Le Sueur's portrayal of other women, but I for one would like to note that she tells us a lot about proletarian realism and the problems of communist writing.

Similarly, most women who read Doris Lessing like to talk about the relations with men she describes, who dominates, who is subordinate. We discuss the woman-woman bonding, the crises of the heart. All this is valid, but seems to me to obfuscate the point that Doris Lessing was a Communist, her central characters' central crises those of the post-Khrushchev left. I think she has done more than any other English-speaking writer in modern times to make the communist experience a valid area for literary exploration. Am I wrong—or is there not some sort of willful blackout going on that dictates these writers be discussed as women first and foremost and only incidentally as social or political beings?

Take Marge Piercy—no one in American letters has more vividly presented the life of the young, often second generation, post-SDS left. Yet again her novels are treated only as a woman's contribution.

I don't mean to denigrate women's concerns, only to offer a look at these three writers that may restore a more balanced appraisal by pointing out the intensely political aspect of their contributions.

### Le Sueur

Meridel Le Sueur was born with the century but is only recently, with the feminist movement, enjoying a revival. I'm not sure about Le Sueur's relationship to the Communist Party. She was, at the very least, close. In any event, writing in the twenties and thirties for *Masses*, *New Masses*, *the Worker* and International Press, Le Sueur brought to the dictates of proletarian realism a deep personal sympathy for the poor of the Depression and most especially for women.

Nowhere does Le Sueur discuss the problems of life within the organized left, as do Lessing and Piercy, but her work, a cross-section of which is provided in *Ripening*, recently published by The Feminist Press, strikes one as the work of a seminal figure of revolutionary feminism.

Primarily because she does not engage in the political soul-searching of Lessing and Piercy, there is a freshness to her voice that has not been matched—indeed, very likely could not be matched—by more recent left-wing writers.

At times the unself-consciousness seems like naïveté. And sometimes she herself is aware of it. Speaking of her father, a populist socialist of the old school, she writes, "The amazing thing about the radicals of that day was thier indomitable optimism."<sup>1</sup>

What distinguishes Le Sueur from the hack prol realism novelist is a genuine compassion for her characters and concern for their plight developed in a rather unique lyrical style.

Le Sueur was not herself from a strictly proletarian background. Her parents were early socialist activists, comfortably situated. Without turning against them, Le Sueur pursued an abiding identification with the Depression poor. Most of the selections in *Ripening* treat, either journalistically or fictionally, the woes of the underclass, most especially destitute women.

Le Sueur is early among women writers to devote her

talents primarily to the problems of women, speaking almost always in the voice of the downtrodden. In a small piece of reportage, first published in 1932 in *New Masses*, "Women on the Breadlines," Le Sueur typically concerns herself with women affected by the Depression. Here, her deep-felt sympathy borders on pathos. Observing one young woman, as she does with many in these Depression pieces, she writes:

She hadn't had work for eight months. "You've got to give me something," she kept saying. The woman in charge flew into a rage that probably came from days and days of suffering on her part, because she is unable to give jobs, having none. She flew into a rage at the girl and there they were facing each other in a rage both helpless, helpless. This woman told me once that she could hardly bear the suffering she saw, hardly bear it, that she couldn't eat sometimes and had nightmares at night.<sup>2</sup>

and then the kicker:

It is even humiliating to try to sell one's labor. When there is no buyer.

Reading Le Sueur, modern radicals can glimpse the extent to which to the thirties generation, the Depression stood for the end of capitalism, the beginning of a new consciousness. I surmise a conviction on Le Sueur's part that identification with the jobless, the homeless, the hungry and tired—announcing their plight—was the greatest contribution a writer could make to the imminent social revolution. As she writes:

It's not the suffering of birth, death, love that the young reject, but the suffering of endless labor without dream, eating the spare bread in bitterness, being a slave without the security of a slave.<sup>3</sup>

Nowhere in the literature of the period is there a more conscientious identification with the poor, especially for purposes of suggesting the forthcoming change in society. In her short pieces "Women are Hungry," Le Sueur writes:

There is a whole generation of young girls now who don't remember any boom days and don't believe in any Eldorado, or success, or prosperity. Their thin bones bear witness to a different thing. The women have learned something. Something is seeping into them that is going to make a difference for several generations. Something is happening to them.<sup>4</sup>

One of the more interesting pieces in the thirties section of *Ripening* is a small bit of reportage "I Was Marching," recounting Le Sueur's participation in the Minneapolis general strike of 1934. The short piece is perhaps central to an understanding of what has happened to the "writers of commitment" in more modern times. Le Sueur does not suffer from the angst of the isolated individual. She is part of a vision of mass action unattenuated by agonizing individualistic self-doubt that may very well recur in our time. Le Sueur, in the thirties, saw herself as part of a social force, an identification that she was never to abandon or disown. Writing of Minneapolis strike headquarters:

Looking at that dark and lively building, massed with men, I knew my feelings to be those belonging to disruption, chaos, and disintegration and I felt their direct and awful movement, mute and powerful, drawing them into a close and glowing cohesion like a powerful conflagration in the midst of the city. And it filled me with fear and awe and at the same time hope. I knew this action to be prophetic and indicative of future actions and I wanted to be part of it.<sup>5</sup>

She concludes with as profound an identification with the mass of striking workers as any I've read in the



period:

I felt my legs straighten. I felt my feet join in that strange shuffle of thousands of bodies moving with direction, of thousands of feet, and my own breath with the gigantic breath. As if an electric charge had passed through me, my hair stood on end. I was marching."<sup>6</sup>

One of the great attractions of Le Sueur's work for this generation is its devotion to women and to the women's cause. Her major novel *The Girl*, written first in 1939 but only recently published by West End Press, is, she says, the product of months of listening at a group run by women to share experiences, histories, and feelings. The pathos that colors the characterization of Clara, the girl of the title, her poverty, and the rather desperate attachment she forms to her brute of a mate, Butch, speaks of an emotional attraction of an author to her character that is unrelieved by the doubt and distance characteristic of most twentieth-century fiction. The woman-to-woman bonding is a powerful aspect of *The Girl* to a degree unequalled until the most recent generation of women writers. Clara gets away from her family's poverty, goes to the city to find work, discovers sex, has an abortion, and the poverty, the pervasive poverty, drives her to play moll to Butch's bank-robbing scheme. Through it all, there is always a group of women to whom Clara can turn, who care for her much more than any man does. At the end, with Clara dead, Le Sueur leans a little more heavily on the working-class message than anyone now would care to be caught doing. The narrator mourns:

Was she a criminal? Was she in danger? Clara never got any wealth. She died a pauper. She never stole timber or wheat or made poor flour. She never stole anyone's land or took it for high interest on the mortgage. She never got rich on the labor of others. She never fattened off a war. She never made ammunition or guns. She never hurt no one. Who killed Clara? Who will kill us?"

Most women writers of the left in the period following the time of Le Sueur's most abundant writing have warded off this kind of proletarian realism—perhaps at some sacrifice of the warm compassion for her fellow women, that comes through in her work.

## Lessing

Doris Lessing has probably done more than other writers—Steinbeck, Swados and Wright included—to make the experience of being a Communist palatable and comprehensible to a generation of the reading public. She discusses what it is like to be a Communist, to have been a Communist, to wonder all one's life what it has meant to be a Communist. But never, in her writing, did she follow the Party line. In point of fact, addressing herself to the kind of proletarian realism Le Sueur practiced, Lessing begins one of her early works, *In Pursuit of the English*, describing her run-in with the Party chairman as she attempts to become "proletarian."

I came to England. I lived, for the best of reasons, namely, I was short of money, in a household crammed to the roof with people who worked with their hands. After a year of this I said with naïve pride to a member of the local watch committee that now, at last, I must be considered to have served my apprenticeship. The reply was pitying, but not without human sympathy: "These are not the real working-class. They are the lumpen proletariat, tainted by petit bourgeois ideology." I rallied. I said that, having spent a lot of my time with Communists, either here

or in Africa, a certain proportion of whom, even though a minority, are working-class, surely some of the magic must have rubbed off on me? The reply came: "The Communist Party is the vanguard of the working-class and obviously *not typical*." . . . Finally, I put in some time in a housing estate in a New Town, and everyone I met was a trade unionist, a member of the Labour Party, or held other evidence of authenticity. It was then that I realized I was defeated. "The entire working-class of Britain has become tainted by capitalism or has lost its teeth. It is petit bourgeois to a man. If you really want to understand the militant working-class, you have to live in a community in France, let's say near the Renault works, or better still, why don't you take a trip to Africa where the black masses are not yet corrupted by industrialism."<sup>8</sup>

To say that Lessing dismisses proletarian realism so lightheartedly is not to suggest that she abandons realism as a mode to join with the negationists and black humor ranks that are characteristic of modernistic writing since Kafka.

In her essay "The Small Personal Voice" Lessing has written:

For me the highest point of literature was the novel of the nineteenth century, the work of Tolstoy, Stendhal, Dostoevsky, Balzac, Turgenev, Chekhov; the work of the great realists. I define realism as art which springs so vigorously and naturally from a strongly-held though not necessarily intellectually-defined, view of life that it absorbs symbolism. I hold the view that the realist novel, the realist story, is the highest form of prose writing; higher than and out of the reach of any comparison with expressionism, impressionism, symbolism, naturalism, or any other ism.<sup>9</sup>

Adapting then, the methods of the realist novelists, Lessing has devoted a large part of her output, from the *Children of Violence* series to, capping it all, *The Golden Notebook* to a complex career-commitment to the understanding of the communist experience in modern times—including an exploration of the feelings of the women characters with their ambivalences and cynicism. I suspect that this concern for feeling in a political context has drawn many women and not strictly women of the left to her work. Surely Martha Quest and Anna Wulf are among the strongest, most identifiable characters of the modern scene.

For those still maintaining some form of commitment to a changed social order, Lessing offers perhaps the most telling portrait of the relationship of individuals to the major radical experience of our era—the Stalinist destruction of the Marxist ideal.

For Lessing it would be unthinkable to engage in the sort of working-class boosterism that Le Sueur does with such appeal. On the contrary, Lessing's work evokes concertedly the pain of having one's best to a false god. In *The Golden Notebook*, placed in 1957, just one year after the Khrushchev revelations at the Twentieth Congress CPSU, the protagonist Anna Wulf discusses the communist experience as she knew it, first in Africa during and after World War II:

For us, then . . . a period of intense activity began. This phase, one of jubilant confidence, ended some time in 1944, well before the end of the war. This change was not due to an outside event, like a change in the Soviet Union's 'line'; but was internal, and self-developing, and, looking back, I can see its beginning almost from the first day of the establishment of the 'communist' group. . . . It is now obvious that inherent in the structure of a communist party or group is a

self-dividing principle. Any communist party anywhere exists and perhaps even flourishes by this process of discarding individuals or groups; not because of personal merits or demerits, but according to how they accord with the inner dynamism of the party at any given moment.<sup>10</sup>

Against that "process of discarding individuals," Lessing almost single-handedly undertakes in many of her major works, and *The Golden Notebook* primarily, to reconstitute, reassert, affirm the palpitations of the individual stricken with a political consciousness. Oddly enough, it is this crisis of conviction, the loss of "jubilant confidence," that unites Lessing with the post-Nietzschean strain of negationist modernists—that is, with those of the nineteenth century and beyond who responded most acutely to the loss of religious belief. But Lessing's triumph is to reassert, through her strong women and their bondings and pairings, a kind of faith in consciousness, in feeling, and most of all, in attempts to understand those emotions, that make for the affirmation of the individual.

That Le Sueur is now enjoying a comeback, I suspect derives from her strong identification with women and a rather beguiling if naive personal voice. Lessing's appeal extends beyond the radical contingent, but many of us on the left find in Lessing an important articulation of the disaffection we have all had to contend with, and many of us have experienced ever since the Great Purge Trials or the Stalin-Hitler pact. Lessing has a way of linking that disaffection with the crisis in faith, the clinging for dear life to the consciousness of the individual, that has been emblematic of our entire epoch.

### Piercy

I think it is within that context that one can best approach the work of Marge Piercy, one of the foremost writers of the American contemporary left. At least three of Piercy's major novels deal with radicalism in some form—*Small Changes*, *Vida*, and the recent, *Braided Lives*. Of these, *Vida* probably has done the most to explore and delineate the New Left experience of the late sixties and seventies. Vida's radicalism burns with the impatience of her generation. She and her comrades in the movement (read SDS, then Weather Underground) lack both tradition, especially in the form of mentors, and a mass movement to connect with. Vida, gone underground after participating in a political bombing, is seen in her own milieu:

Every person in SAW had their own politics—anarchist, liberal, communist, democratic-socialist, syndicalist, Catholic-worker, Maoist, Schachtmanite, Spartacist—but what mattered was the politics of the act. Decisions rose from solving problems in struggle. Everyone was accommodated in the vast lumbering movement. Vida was content to be of the New Left, without a fancier label. All that hairsplitting—that was what the poor Old Lefties had sat around doing in dreary meetings in the fifties nobody else attended while the resident FBI agent took notes."

It is perhaps obvious to say that Piercy's generation (mine as well) or at the very least Vida, her character, suffers from the combined failure of the left brought about by the demise of the Communist tradition under Stalinism, and the quiescence and complacency of the working class in recent times. One has only to read Meridel Le Sueur, especially the selection from the thirties in *Ripening* to catch a glimpse of the easy associa-

tion with masses of people, the sense of participating in history in the presence of a genuinely viable social force, that was available to young radicals then. Perhaps, we suspect, that was too easy. Reading Le Sueur, we long for the intellectual sophistication, the literate articulation that comes from long years of politically isolated study and hothouse political sects removed from a real movement—the stuff of both Lessing and Piercy. Without that movement to connect with, we can understand Vida's impatience, ultimately even her terrorism. As Piercy observes: "History was a sense of urgency, a rush in the blood and a passion to make things better, to push with her whole life on what was."<sup>12</sup>

At the same time, the Old Left tradition seems to Vida and her fellow revolutionaries bankrupt, ludicrous, absurd. They do read Marx and Lenin and assail each other with the epithets of timeworn jargon (Vida keeps her distance from such strutting) but they don't really want to be engaging in the scholarship, the solving of such conundrums as the crisis in socialist theory facing the challenge of fascism, Stalinism and Western imperialism. That's for the deadheads. These are activists. Well-read to be sure, they itch to make their efforts felt, to make heavier and heavier demands "Until the whole system buckles."

Lessing and Piercy both turn away from the ideal of the autonomous revolutionary—the dispassionate, non-emotional character who neither questioned nor felt. Both take a keen interest in the reality of deep-feeling characters—women, in the main, who live in a sensual, emotional realm, and who speak about it in detail, perhaps at times beyond what we might wish. This would seem to be the antidote, intentional on Lessing's part, instinctive, it seems, on Piercy's to the inhumanity the radical cause has had the misfortune to inherit. Perhaps this is why Lessing's work speaks so well to the young radicals of the sixties generation, and to the whole feminist milieu. It is as if the only saving grace, after the debacle of Stalinism, the conservatization of the working class, is to assert the authenticity of the individual—in all her complexity of feeling even more than of thought. Dream analysis replaces dogma; bonding and pairing supplant cant.

### Feminism and Modernism

It may very well be unfair to fault a writer for what she does not do—writers are under no obligation to meet all the needs of any given reader. I do note, however, that none of these writers expresses the enthusiasm for ideology, the incandescence of pure Marxist thought, that nourished so many of us, all but kept us intellectually alive during the bleak years of the fifties and even now stands well to inspire a new generation of graduate students to undertake the pithier knots in modern dialectical reasoning. Maybe that kind of excitement with the complexities of socialist theory belongs to the realm of modernism which so many women writers seem to shun.

Lessing and Piercy are not writing agit prop—but they are writing realism and in that regard they do speak for the modern women's readership—much contemporary women's literature, criticism as well. Here I've presented the radical women's experience; we've also encountered the lesbian experience, the housewife experience, the



black experience, the career crisis, and so on. There's nothing wrong with the literature of experience, the catalog of happenings. It is just that most influential modern writers, and not men only, don't write that way anymore. Did Kafka really at some point in his childhood experience being a cockroach? Did Beckett spend his adolescence hanging out with a buddy on some dismal streetcorner waiting for the third guy to show up? Did Gertrude Stein actually talk that way? We must face the fact that quotidian experience is not the meat of *Finnegan's Wake*, of Sartre, Pynchon, Hawkes, Serrate, Sontag. Realism clearly is not the stuff of modernism. What is called for these days is transcendence. Especially transcendence by negation. What is not said is more important than what is. The point is to rise above mere experience—the eating and shitting and dreaming and fucking bits that mostly go on in popular literature. We must negate all that animal stuff, get beyond it, in order to know ourselves as truly human, and to allow art an existence independent from experience, history and politics, in order to reach the new post-religious divine.

In the face of this modernist attitude women readers, denied any depiction of the pain of their lives for so long, now demand accurate portrayals from their spokespeople. They do not want to be told that everyday life is meaningless by so many men who have the power to deny the means to everyday survival that women have yet to achieve. Perhaps it is no surprise that women seem not ready to transcend a spiritual malaise they are not privileged to experience.

In his book *The Crisis in Historical Materialism*, Stanley Aronowitz charges, "There is almost no modernist tradition within American feminist writing." This may be, Aronowitz explains, because modernist art, dominated by men, has become the high art of the ruling culture from which women have been excluded:

The task of feminist literature and visual forms has been to insert women's voice in social and cultural discourse, even as it asserts the absence of the female voice in male-dominated art. Thus, it is not surprising that narratives purporting to represent real lives are preferred by women writers and filmmakers to the codes of exclusion. Women are creating new communities by means of their art, telling the stories of their common oppression while men, for the most part, express the alienated individual subject. If realist art, rather than being considered from its formal side, is understood as a way to surpass the seriality of the contemporary world by means of the representation of particularity, then the function of political art is understood in a new way.<sup>13</sup>

In sum, women writers have been excluded from contemporary art, and so now want their voices heard as affirmation of the validity of their experience, thus write an experiential prose, in a realist vein.

Frankly, I find this argument bordering on the patronizing. Feminist realism is to be accorded a sort of affirmative action portion of artistic attention. However, I am hard put to argue on the basis of the works of LeSueur, Lessing and Piercy that I have been discussing here.

It is not quite accurate to suggest that women are constitutionally or even historically unsuited to modernist diction. Wasn't Gertrude Stein a primal figure in both modernism and post-modernism? Surely the teasing haunts of Djuna Barnes and Nathalie Serrate bear inclusion in such a discussion. In our own times there

are the arid antinomies of Susan Sontag's fiction that defy experientialism, and cool anti-sentimentalist undertones of Grace Paley's stories, many of which take place in a locus of radical activism. One could go on: Ann Beattie and Cynthia Ozick and, now, Bobbie Ann Mason inform their true-life parables with the harsh bite of individualism, of a refusal to politicize in any dogmatic sense which suggest they have been touched by the modernist strain. And, I would conjecture that women's literature, as more and more women gain an audience, will include more and more experimenters of an individualistic—even alienated—bent.

What does seem to hold is that left-wing literature, as it has been advanced in the past by Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, the early Steinbeck and Harvey Swados, and one might include the new voice of John Sayles, in addition to the women I have discussed here, has so far demanded a positivistic realist form.

Le Sueur does indeed appear to derive from a more optimistic political experience and Piercy could be accused of detailing, or affirming perhaps, the validity of quotidian feminist existence as the appropriate subject matter for fiction. But Lessing may speak most eloquently to the subject of the novel as she foresees its role in the labor we are all undergoing to produce a more humane, more positive social order.

Yet we are all of us, directly or indirectly, caught up in a great whirlwind of change; and I believe that if an artist has once felt this, in himself, and felt himself as part of it; if he has once made the effort of imagination necessary to comprehend it, it is an end of despair, and the aridity of self-pity. It is the beginning of something else which I think is the minimum act of humility for a writer: to know that one is a writer at all because one represents, makes articulate, is continuously and invisibly fed by, numbers of people who are inarticulate, to whom one belongs, to whom one is responsible. . . . The novelist talks, as an individual to individuals, in a small personal voice.<sup>14</sup>

Lessing echoes the point Trotsky advanced in *Literature and Revolution*, that after the victory of the revolution, with the forging of a new order, artists must be free to experiment in many directions so as to anticipate the way of being suited to socialist man. In that respect, despite their realist modes, I think these women writers offer a glimpse of the concerns of the political life, as it is led by men as well as women, both now and conceivably into the future. ■

#### NOTES

1. Le Sueur, Meridel, *Ripening*. Old Westbury, New York: The Feminist Press. 1982. P. 59.
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Review of *A Machinist's Semi-Automated Life*, by Roger Tulin. Singlejack Books, PO Box 1906, San Pedro, CA 90733; 1984. 43 pages. \$3.50 plus 15% postage and handling (and, for California residents, 6.5% sales tax).

by Samuel Friedman

There are lots of problems that make it hard to build a workers' movement of any kind, let alone a revolutionary workers' movement. One major problem is that our jobs are so different that we have trouble understanding each other's demands, needs, and sources of pride. Truck drivers, auto assembly line workers, and word processor operators know little of each other's work and often have little sympathy for each other's difficulties or struggles. This makes class-wide unity difficult. Indeed, within conglomerate unions like the Teamsters, it even makes it hard to build unity among all the members (as TDU has discovered).

Singlejack Books has published a series of excellent (and short!) booklets that present the human side of work in ways that help break down this barrier to unity. These include booklets on longshoring, foundry work, and pickle factory work; a collection of poems about auto assembly; and a novel about working in a welfare office.

*A Machinist's Semi-Automated Life* is an excellent large-format (5" by 8.5") addition to this collection. It gave me some idea of what a machinist does all day; of how some of the machines operate; of the boredom that work with numerically-controlled equipment entails; and of the contempt with which employers view the operators of numerically-controlled machines. Tulin emphasizes this last point by showing the anger produced in a machinist by "an ad put out by a company that makes these machines. They had monkeys in the pictures running the machines. Monkeys! That's how they see what I'm doing here." (p. 6.)

This theme of computerization and its effects on machinists runs through the book, showing that Braverman<sup>1</sup> understood the direction in which the owners were trying to take the machine trades—namely, a deskilling in which brain work would be wrested from machinists and relegated to a few engineers and in which control would be further centralized in management. Indeed, Tulin gives a compelling picture of the way this strategy hurts—or, better, devastates—the people on whom it is inflicted. But Tulin goes beyond Braverman. He discusses (although too briefly) the possibilities micro computers open up for *increasing* rather than decreasing the creativity and productivity of machinists' work if the workers controlled the process. He also shows that in spite of all the efforts of capital, deskilling still leaves the workers' skills as a crucial part of the production process. Only workers' experience and judgment keep the machines from turning out scrap. Somehow, many managers have trouble understanding this. (The importance of workers' knowledge in other, less skilled industries is made in Kusterer, *Know-How on the Job*.<sup>2</sup>)

Of course, workers don't just sit back and accept deskilling without defending themselves. Tulin shows that they still use machinists' long-term tactic, restriction of

output. However, to judge from this book, at least in the shops where the author has worked, they have not carried resistance much further. This may or may not be due to the shops apparently being non-union.

As Tulin shows, machinists' work shares many of the qualities of all working class work. Machinists are alienated from their labor in that they have no control over the product. Indeed, they usually don't even know exactly what it is they are making, much less what each part does in the equipment for which it is made. Also like other work, machining subjects workers to frequent harassment by management and to a never-ending assault on their dignity. On the brighter side, machine shops are communities in which workers set up a dense network of personal relationships that add interest, friendship, and a degree of grief to the working day.

In summary, then, this book is another Singlejack gem. It may be brief—but I think it's a bargain at the price. Most books are too long and convey little insight or enjoyment per page. *A Machinist's Semi-Automated Life* is so well written you are sorry it is so short—but it tells you a lot on every page. ■

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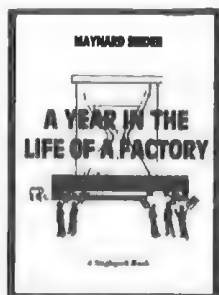
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<sup>1</sup>Samuel Friedman is author of *Teamster Rank and File* published by Columbia University Press.



Mike Davis' essay on the dynamics of the nuclear arms race raises important questions for socialists active in both the anti-militarist and anti-intervention movements. The editors of *Against the Current* hope that his essay on the relation of the nuclear arms race to imperialist intervention in the third world will provoke a broad ranging discussion and debate. We are in the process of soliciting responses, and we invite additional comments, criticisms and contributions.



# Nuclear Imperialism and Extended Deterrence

by Mike Davis \*

**E**dward Thompson's 'Notes on Exterminism' sets out to challenge what he regards as the debilitating 'immobilism' of Marxism towards the imminent danger of nuclear holocaust. Thompson insists on the urgent need to reconceptualize the relationship between the arms race and the Cold War in a situation where the former increasingly commands the latter, and where 'imperialism' has become an inadequate category to grasp the deadly symmetry of over-kill on both sides. Instead he proposes the concept of 'exterminism' as the fulcrum of his essay. In the response which follows, I readily accept the pertinence of Thompson's critique of socialist theory for not generating an original analysis of the specificity of the strategic arms race or the transformation which it has wrought in world politics. The absence is a real one, and it has undoubtedly diminished the political appeal and intellectual authority of historical materialism within the peace movement. At the same time, however, I doubt whether the concept of exterminism provides an adequate analytic framework or, what is more important, a sufficiently realistic assessment of the present war danger. The burden of my argument will be that any concept which collates all the 'inertial,' 'irrational,' 'symmetrical' and institutionally 'autonomous' aspects of the arms race into a single over-riding process will make it harder to understand the crucial connection between the overall nuclear balance and counter-revolutionary initiatives in the Third World. In several steps I will argue that the peace movement in Europe and America must mobilize not only against the general danger of an 'inertial thrust', but specifically also against the open US attempt to create a strategic nuclear 'umbrella' for new military—and possibly tactical nuclear—interventions in the Third World.

## I. Deciphering Exterminism

The concept of 'exterminism' is constructed by way of analogy with that of 'imperialism,' but also as a replacement for it, in Thompson's essay. In Thompson's presentation exterminism today is a formation common to West and East alike, yet intrinsic to neither. For while it is deeply embedded in the existence of powerful, 'isomorphic' networks of interests (industrial, bureaucratic, military), it is not directly grounded in class structure nor is it coextensive with the reproduction or preservation of any mode of production. Exterminism, in other words, is not the 'highest stage' of anything else, since that would imply organic development and some connection with a 'motor of history'; rather, like a cancer, it is simply a dead end for the whole organism. Acquiring a causal autonomy that is equivalent to a veto-power over the entire social formation, Thompson suggests, the arms race has become its own demiurge.

At the same time, while Thompson presents exterminism as the implicit apotheosis of the power of certain interest groups and bureaucratic strata, it is the *unforeseen* convergence of their separate 'thrusts' that threatens to override class or human interests to the point of universal annihilation. What ultimately confers cohesion on the different components of exterminism is the bipolar confrontation itself. Thompson clearly hints that if the Cold War did not exist, it would have had to be invented—since it provides the indispensable basis for

domestic unity. It is the mirror-image demand of internal hegemony, expressed through ideology, in both the United States and the Soviet Union that sanctions, reproduces and 'addicts' the social formation to exterminism. 'Symmetry,' in Thompson's usage thus has two meanings. First it refers to the situation in which state power in each bloc has become the *raison d'être* of its opposite via the permanent brandishing of the Bomb. Secondly it indicates an actual homology between the bureaucratic and military structures of Cold War mobilization in the USSR and the United States.

Finally, Thompson expects the actual slippage towards exterminism to come not from politics as we might expect—that is, from field of forces that must be analysed 'in terms of origins, intentions or goals, contradictions or conjunctures' (which he discounts)—but from the 'messy inertia' of the weapons systems themselves. Thus he points to 'pressures from the laboratories,' 'impatience amongst the war gamers,' 'the implacable upwards creep of weapons technology' or the 'sudden hot flush of ideological passion' as its most likely immediate triggers. This deeply pessimistic projection, on the other hand, coexists with a diagnosis that also points in a quite opposite direction. For, as we noted above, in Thompson's account exterminism is not only a fatal inertial thrust towards the end of Northern civilization, it is also, more hopefully, a formation in some sense external to and *separable* from the rival social systems which confront each other today, even if at present it prevails within both of them. This side of

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Thompson's analysis enables him to imagine the possible dismantling of the 'deep structures of the Cold War' without the simultaneous dismantling of the deep structures of capitalist ownership or, for that matter, of bureaucratic domination. 'A revolt of reason and conscience,' in the name of a common 'human ecological imperative,' could bring the Cold War to an end. The evidence of this revolt is the growth of the peace movements in Europe. For it was there that the Cold War started, and it is there that it could be overcome. 'The Cold War can be brought to an end in only two ways: by the destruction of European civilization, or by the reunification of European political culture.'<sup>1</sup> Such a reunification would involve a detente of peoples rather than of states, unfreezing the glaciated divide between Western and Eastern Europe. But it would not necessarily abolish the principal economic or social structures of either. 'Immense differences in social system would remain.' But across them would now move 'the flow of political and intellectual discourse, and of human exchange.' As their rigid ideological and military guards came down, 'the blocs would discover that they had forgotten what their adversary posture was about.'<sup>2</sup>

For Thompson the Cold War today no longer embodies—if it ever did—the confrontation of any overall projects at all, representing more or less coherent or unitary historical agents. Its inertia has rather 'drifted down to us as a collocation of fragmented forces,' each bound together by no necessary internal logic, and bearing no necessary intention or goal. These forces appear in Thompson's text pell-mell, scattered in different parts of it. In the case of the West, there are the abstracted ambitions of scientists in the laboratories; inter-service rivalry; profitability of weapons companies; most importantly, perhaps 'bureaucratic decisions' (but if these are really *decisions*, aren't we back with some notion of political purpose?) or elsewhere 'inertial thrust.' All of this remains relatively sketchy. Causality in the East, however, is even more tentatively marked in. There are the imperatives of 'ideology,' diffusion of military 'patriotism,' influence of officers (not yet 'decisive'), technical superiority of arms industries. The enumeration in either case is close to the initial description: it amounts to little more than collection of fragments. Yet the paradox is that Thompson, after insisting on the random and disaggregated character of the forces generating exterminism, then presents their summation as a political culture that is literally all-pervasive, seeping inexorably into every cell of society and adding it to a fatal toxicant. Having dispersed and miniaturized the *causes* of exterminism, one might say, he magnifies its *effects* out of all scale, to a point where it becomes coextensive with the social order as a whole, as the ubiquitous sickness of a poisoned civilization. 'The USA and the USSR do not *have* military-industrial complexes: they *are* such complexes.' There is a 'cumulative process' in which exterminist 'crystallization in culture accelerates crystallization in the economy and thence to politics and thence back again once more.' The whole vital surplus of East and West alike is symbolically dedicated to the technology of annihilation. Exterminism, the title suggests, may now be built into the very physiological programme of Northern civilization—as the terminal illness of its last stage.

Within this argument, despite differences of local der-

ivation, *essentially*—that is, in all that touches on the fundamental issues of war and peace—everything is the same in East and West, and it is a distraction to dwell on secondary differences or past episodes distinguishing the two. This admonition is applied especially to any attempt to explain the Cold War by looking at its genesis in the post-war epoch, or the respective positions and policies of America and Russia at the time. 'To argue from origins is to take refuge from reality in moralism.' Just as Thompson curiously inverts the typical emphases of his history-writing—which honours agency—in a 'structuralist' conception of exterminism virtually without exterminists, so he casts the reproach of moralism on any effort to reconstruct a political history. But in fact it is not moralistic at all to think that the different histories of the USA and USSR are relevant to our understanding of the Cold War today. The fact that the USA has never been invaded in the 20th century, while Russia has been invaded three times, that during the Second World War the USA lost 1 million dead and prospered in the fastest boom in its history, while the USSR lost 20 million dead and a third to a half of its industrial plant destroyed, is pertinent because it helps us to make certain *predictions* about the behaviour of these two great powers.

Behind Thompson's theoretical construct lies a number of very understandable political motivations. To depict the exterminist contamination as omnipresent is to dramatize the dangers of war with the most urgent and mobilizing of tocsins. To represent the sources of exterminism as a medley of involuntary or atomized forces, on the other hand, is to avoid the great divisive breach of class analysis and social identification of political opponents, and with it the risks of ideological hostilities incompatible with a movement for peace. To refuse investigation into the origins of the Cold War is to forestall the possibility of differential judgement of the two sides to it, that would be internationally even less ecumenical. A benign sleight of hand, of a kind familiar—perhaps inherent—in the discourse of all peace movements, is visible here.

Yet the real history of our time still requires its answers. These answers have political consequences, for peace and for socialism. In what follows, I shall argue that the Cold War in its wider sense is not an arbitrary or anachronistic feud staged essentially in Europe, but a rationally explicable and deeply rooted conflict of opposing social formations and political forces, whose principal centre of gravity has been for some thirty years now the Third World. That conflict would have existed and developed into a Cold War, even if nuclear weapons had never been invented. The Bomb has shaped and misshaped its evolution, and may yet put an end to it altogether. But it is not its spring. That lies in the dynamic of class struggle on a world scale. The rationality of the conflict derives from the incompatible interests of the major actors in it. Thompson contests this rationality, on the grounds that a drift towards common extermination cannot be in any side's interest. But, of course, this is not the first time in history that a discrepancy has opened up between rational interest and irrational outcome. What typically lies between the two is the recurrent historical phenomenon of class *error*, for which Marxists always need to make theoretical allowance. Class interest, as Hamza Alavi has pointed



out, should be conceived not as a source of its own objective, correspondent expression, in an a priori adequacy of means to ends, but rather as the social *basis of calculation* of the agent concerned, that includes in its very definition the possibility of *miscalculation* in a world of antagonistic action and reaction.<sup>3</sup>

In the age of the hydrogen bomb, such miscalculation could indeed lead to mutual annihilation. In that sense, Thompson's warnings of the possibility of accidental triggering or faulty escalation need no further justification; the fear of these must haunt any sober peace movement today. The limitation of 'Notes on Exterminism,' however, is that in concentrating so much moral and mental attention on the irrational and inertial dangers of the arms race, it tends to ignore the deliberate and dynamic calculations of nuclear politics. The result is to sidestep consideration of how the Bomb functions as a central instrument of power in an age of revolution. But to pose the question of *nuclear strategy as politics*—and not bureaucratic inertias—it is necessary to retrieve all those categories that Thompson sets to one side as 'irrelevant': conjuncture and crisis, origin and purpose, classes and modes of production. Indeed, to get at the deep structures of the Cold War we may need to dismantle the concept of exterminism.

## II. The Dynamic of the Cold War

For Thompson, as we have seen, the strategic arms race is the dominant level of world politics and everything else flows from this over-arching and terrible fact. The bipolar contradiction is the constitutive element of the international system, and the only hope for peace (assuming the deadlock of multilateral negotiation) is seen as secession from the dementia of super-power rivalry. Hence the goal of liberating Europe from the Bomb via a 1980s version of the 'positive neutralism' espoused by sections of CND in the 1950s. The weakness of this 'exterminist' view of the Cold War is its inability to elucidate the actual 'why and how' of the Cold War's concrete history. It remains difficult to explain why Eisenhower brandished the Bomb over Korea, why Kennedy went to the brink—and then almost over it—about Cuba, or why Nixon tried nuclear blackmail against Vietnam. Why *those* places? A naive question, perhaps, but one which I believe the current commonsense of the peace movement has difficulty answering, and which Thompson's essay does not address.

To begin to answer this question—and thus apprehend the logic of the situations in which the nuclear danger has most often appeared—it is necessary, in my opinion, to reinstate the revolutionary Marxist conception of the modern epoch as an age of violent, protracted transition from capitalism to socialism. From this perspective the Cold War between the USSR and the United States is ultimately the lightning-rod conductor of all the historic tensions between opposing international class forces, but the bipolar confrontation is not itself the dominant level of world politics. The dominant level is the process of *permanent revolution* arising out of uneven and combined development of global capitalism. This is the true motor of the Cold War. I am not talking about what Thompson at times self-consciously caricatures as the 'drives of world imperialism' or its

'evil will,' but rather the inexorable process by which the international expansion of capital, through its simultaneous destruction of traditional modes of production and its multiplication of modern forms of exploitation, reproduces new 'weak links' within its own political order and revolutionary explosions against itself. The development of capitalism on a planetary scale has likewise internationalized the forces of revolt against it. True, the emergence of these forces displays no simple, evolutionary tendency, but rather the most baffling pattern of contradiction, retrogression and sudden rupture. Nor does their movement have a single, privileged pivot—either metropolitan or 'peripheral'—since it is the result of the system's continual transformation. As Edward Thompson has in his own way so often pointed out, real history is prodigiously overdetermined by the complexity of the world economy, the innumerable nuances of national class structure, the residues of every traditional social conflict, and the capriciousness of human agency. Yet it seems to me indisputable that the major trend in modern history has been the tectonic action of these elemental class struggles within and upon the international state system.

## The Paradox of October

The era of socialist transition was, of course, later in arriving than originally predicted by Marx. Class struggles never acquired a 'pure' international form, but remained compressed inside the pre-existing state system, with all the charge of nationalism and militarism it inevitably transmitted to those revolutions that successfully acquired power within it. Here lay the paradox of October. On the one hand the Russian Revolution changed world history by creating a territorial base of support, with increasing industrial and martial resources, for socialist revolutions abroad, for anti-colonialism, and even, during 1941–44, for the salvation of bourgeois democracy in Western Europe itself. On the other hand, the defeat of revolution in the West forced the USSR at home to resort to a strategy of 'primitive socialist accumulation' (as Preobrazhenski called it) on the basis of its own backwardness and underdevelopment, with all the terrible consequences that flowed from this. For a long period the future extension of socialist revolution became dependent upon material aid or political recognition by the Soviet Union (even true in the case of Yugoslavia in 1944–47). Yet the bureaucratic despotism consolidated in the Soviet Union became a virtual dystopia for the Western working class and a huge fetter on the reconstruction of a real internationalism. Thus the vicious circle which commenced with the original isolation of the October Revolution has continued as a reciprocal parochialization of the labour movement in the West and bureaucratic devaluation of socialism in the USSR (and later, Eastern Europe).

The Soviet Union's role in world politics as the material and military cornerstone of further subtractions from the empire of capital has been largely involuntary. Stalin, in particular, made a sustained effort between 1936 and 1947 to disengage the USSR from the dynamic of permanent revolution. Believing that the survival of the Soviet state was strictly dependent upon its manipulation of the violent divisions between the impe-

rialist powers and its own breakneck industrialization, he essentially sought to reclaim Russia's old position as a legitimate great power with its traditional spheres of influence. To this end, he orchestrated the Popular Fronts, traded away (not always successfully) the fates of popular revolutions—Spain, Greece, Vietnam and China—and manoeuvred incessantly for durable ententes with the 'democratic' sections of Western capital. Yalta was the meridian of Soviet efforts to achieve a reestablishment of a traditional international state system based on the recognition of stable balances of power; and Yalta has remained, in the quarter of a century since Stalin's death, the point of reference for continuing initiatives by Soviet diplomacy. No state in modern history has been more consistent and, in a sense, more open in pursuit of its major geopolitical aims than the USSR since 1936 in its quest for some mode of detente with the West.

Two factors, however, have combined to make any lasting stabilization of the relations between the USSR and the capitalist states impossible. First was the post-war restructuring of the world market under American hegemony, which for the first time created a basis for peaceful coexistence between the advanced segments of imperialist capital that allowed them to concentrate their immense economic and military resources against the USSR and international revolutionary movements. Although differences between American and European imperialism were still occasionally to provide space for Soviet diplomatic manoeuvre—notably in the rifts between Eden and Dulles, De Gaulle and Kennedy or Johnson, Brandt and Nixon—there has been no room (at least in the absence of a truly unified and supranational European capitalist state) for the restoration of a traditional balance of power. Moreover there is a grain of truth in the primarily instrumentalist and 'internalist' theories of the Cold War, to the extent that the Soviet threat was indeed an indispensable condition for the imposition of US hegemony on its allies and the American reorganization of the world economy and Western political system. The Cold War was in this sense 'functionalized' as a forcing-house of inter-capitalist unity and systemic restructuring.

But as I have argued above, it would be a profound mistake to see the origins of the Cold War as primarily an internal or instrumentalist regulation of American (or Soviet) societies. Its driving force, and the second factor mitigating against permanent detente, has been the alloy of socialism and nationalism in the dependent and semi-colonial countries (together with the auxiliary insurgencies of more traditional nationalist movements under often atavistic social leaderships). Since 1945, there has been a socialist revolution on the average of every four years. While none of these postwar revolutions has had the universalistic aspiration or resonance of October (*'patria o muerte'* would have been anathema as a slogan to the Bolsheviks), nor have they been simply national events. In the first place anti-capitalist revolutions, whatever their national epicentre, have always had a seismic impact on distinctive regional substructures of the world economy. This is the rational kernel of the 'domino' theory. To extend the geological metaphor, the most important 'tectonic plates' of post-war revolution have been, respectively, the Balkans (1944–48), East Asia (1946–today) and Latin America

(1959–today). Secondly, these revolutionary waves have had two, successively different geopolitical orientations. The 1944–54 revolutions in the Balkans and Far East were centred in the historically contested borderlands (especially the Lower Danube Valley and Manchuria) where Russia since the Tsars had confronted and battled German and Japanese expansion—indeed, all these revolutions germinated as national resistance movements against German and Japanese fascist occupation. In contrast the post-1959 revolutions have been centred in the strategic areas of the traditional European colonial empires or in the very backyard of American imperialism. This distinction between the 'Eurasian' and 'Third World' phases of postwar revolution, along with a recognition of the regional dynamic of each national revolution, is indispensable for an understanding of the development of the Cold War.

### Europe and Asia

Within this pattern, however, there was one special area. In the more developed regions of Central and North-Eastern Europe, the post-war upheavals would not have led to the overthrow of capitalism without the decisive presence of the Red Army. The communization of this zone, which included the more important nations of Eastern Europe—Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Rumania—was a process apart, dictated essentially by Stalin's determination to create a protective *glacis* round the USSR. The creation of these buffer states was totally unwelcome to the USA, which had looked forward to profitable opportunities for trade and investment in them after 1945. But in the last resort it could and did accept them, for two reasons which hold good to this day. Firstly, it knew that the USSR was likely on the most traditional of strategic grounds to want a security belt on its Western frontiers, and would claim a 'moral' right to one after the Nazi attack and its consequences: it was well aware that this aim did not involve any principle of messianic revolutionary expansionism. Secondly, Eastern Europe was far the poorer half, and its forcible sovietization by an even poorer USSR logically implied a corresponding US sphere of interest in the far richer Western half of the continent; more, it actually consolidated capitalism in the latter by the spectre of authoritarian austerity it henceforward presented. Thus although there were seismic waves in the Balkans, which threatened capitalism in Greece, once the socialist revolutions of the Lower Danube were integrated into the Soviet bloc as such (or expelled from it, precisely because of their autonomy, as in the case of Yugoslavia), there was thereafter never any 'spread-effect' to be feared from the People's Democracies. On the contrary, their very existence contained its own dual—ideological and strategic—self-limitation, the two assisting Washington to clinch the lion's share of the Old World. For just as 'artificial' socialism was introduced into Budapest, Prague or Warsaw, so capitalism was the 'natural' tendency of growth in Paris, Hamburg or Turin, given the balance of political forces in the West. The USA was working with the spontaneous socio-historical grain there, as much as the USSR was working against it beyond the Elbe. The result, of course, was the triumphant consolidation of bourgeois democracy in Western Europe, with the aid of the Marshall Plan, and the repression of any vestige of proletarian democracy



in Eastern Europe, with the inquisitions against Titoism.

Ever since, the official history and ideology of the West has always magnified Europe as the central arena of the Cold War, because it was there that political and economic contrasts worked in its favour, that capitalism enjoyed a moral and cultural superiority, and that the USSR could be portrayed as a national oppressor. The Europeanism of Thompson's own vision of the Cold War is itself partially a victim of this orthodox Western construal of the conflict to its own advantage. In reality, however, the first act of the Cold War was to provide a completely misleading image of the structure of the drama as a whole, as it has unfolded to date. For the European theatre had been stabilized by 1950. Capitalism had nothing to fear from an impoverished and 'satellite' socialism in the East, once it had contained the labour movement in the West. Thus it is striking that though the USSR has had to intervene militarily three times to keep control in Eastern Europe, the deployments of Soviet troops in E. Germany, Hungary and Czechoslovakia have never seriously disturbed the international peace. The West has each time exploited the occasion to the full ideologically, while remaining essentially passive diplomatically and militarily. There has never been a major war crisis in Europe since the Berlin airlift. This pattern would be inexplicable if the Cold War really pivoted on Europe. By contrast, first 'Asia' and then the 'Third World' have been active arenas of Cold War conflict in the past thirty years, because there the USA and its allies have faced spontaneously generated, uncontrollable outbreaks of revolution, which—from China to Nicaragua—have had an ideological and political spread-effect rather than counter-effect, and which could not be fitted into any division of spheres of interest of the European type. In other words, the greater vulnerability of capitalism in the 'periphery' (so far) has dictated the greater importance of this zone for the permanence of the Cold War.

Even at the outset, however, Asia intervened directly in the emergence of the Cold War in Europe. For it is not difficult to identify the two events which totally undermined the Soviet effort to establish a durable accommodation with the United States: these were the Chinese Revolution and the integration of West Germany into the American alliance (an act prior to the establishment of the German Democratic Republic, at a time when Stalin sought the neutralization of Germany). The two arenas were inextricably interlinked, and it was precisely the crisis over Germany that forced Stalin reluctantly to provide arms and support to the revolution in East Asia which he had tried to barter away in 1945–46. A fundamental pattern was thus established in the development of the Cold War: first the principle of linkage between the European and Asian spheres of Soviet security (recently demonstrated by the compensatory intervention in Afghanistan following NATO's nuclear escalation in Europe); and secondly, the implacable strategic constraint on the USSR, in the face of American pressure, to support and arm at least *certain* revolutions. In other words, the Soviet Union has attempted to blunt the ceaseless attempts of the USA to enforce its geopolitical and military paramountcy by strategically 'annexing' appropriate socio-economic upheavals in the

dependent capitalist countries. Thus in the case of the first great Cold War crisis the USSR, faced with an American nuclear monopoly and a new ring of hostile encirclement, tried to safeguard Soviet cities and Russian interests in Central Europe by transforming the mass peasant armies of Red Asia into instruments of its own conservative national diplomacy (a design made dramatically clear by the Geneva conferences of 1954). In contrast to the American imperium, the 'Soviet Bloc' emerged, not out of a grand design for a world order, but as the accretion of battered and besieged 'socialisms in one country' huddled together for sheer survival round the preponderance of the first-come.

The alternative to the Soviet bloc model of bureaucratic and nationalistic socialism—in the absence of a revolutionary wave in post war Western Europe—would have been the crystallization of a new pole of socialist internationalism around a regional federation of revolutionary states. 'Regional,' because only such a supranational entity in the Third World could command the economic and military resources to defend its independence from imperialism and to negotiate a fully autonomous alliance with the USSR. During the sixties and early seventies both Cuba and Indochina temporarily appeared as the potential nuclei of regional revolutions with strong internationalist outlooks independent of the Sino-Soviet conflict. For this very reason, together with the important geopolitical shift which they represented in the axis of world revolution, they threatened to transform the Cold War qualitatively by challenging any bipolar management of revolutionary crises. In the event, however, the Cold War was 'triangulated,' but not by the emergence of the new Tricontinental International, but by the formation of Mao's unholy alliance with Nixon and the Chinese lead in containing the shock waves of the historic triumph of the Indochinese Revolution in 1975. Simultaneously the renewed pressures of the United States—with the overthrow of Allende in Chile and the continuing blockade of Vietnam by 'other means'—as well as severe internal economic problems, forced both Cuba and the Indochinese states into closer dependence upon the USSR.

It would be illusory to imagine that the Indian Summer of detente in 1972–75 was forced upon the United States by its defeat in Indochina, as some sections of the left have maintained. The conjuncture was more complex. On the one hand, the USSR was for the first time approaching parity with the United States in the strategic balance of nuclear power; on the other hand, the China Card represented a major shift in the global balance of power against the USSR. Simultaneously the USSR had managed to bring both Cuba and Vietnam within its bloc, while the Nixon administration was confident that global 'Vietnamization'—the strategy of substituting sub-imperialist police powers for conventional US forces—would guarantee stability in the main sectors of the American Empire. As the Soviet academician Trofimienko has explained in an exceedingly frank and revealing essay in a recent issue of *Foreign Affairs*, the essence of the Nixon and Ford administration's approach to the USSR at the summit meetings of the seventies was a trade-off between nuclear parity and the containment of Third World revolution.<sup>4</sup> 'Linkage' in the jargon of Kissinger meant the US codification of the

strategic arms status quo in exchange for Soviet ratification of the socio-political status quo in the Third World. The contradiction, of course, in Kissinger's grand design for a neo-Bismarckian settlement of the Cold War was that the Soviet Union, even with Cuba and Vietnam now under tow, could no more prevent the outbreak of new revolutions in the 1970s than it could in the late 1940s (when international communist discipline was incomparably stronger).

I have no disagreement with Edward Thompson's assessment of the importance of the armourers' lobby in Washington in promoting its vested interests in MX missiles, Trident submarines, and B-1 bombers. But again I do not think that a primarily 'internalist' analysis enables us to understand why, at the mid-point of the Carter administration's brief career, the Brezinskis and Browns suddenly carried the day against the proponents of detente like Vance and Young. An analysis of the shift in the international conjuncture becomes absolutely necessary. I think the origins of the new Cold War in that sense are not hard to seek. In a sentence, *the new Cold War is principally the product of a gigantic and relatively synchronized destabilization of peripheral and semi-industrial capitalism in the wake of the world economic crisis.*

### The 'Collapse' of Dependent Capitalism?

Absolute immiseration is expanding at an unprecedented rate in the history of the world economy, and the economic infrastructures of some societies are literally collapsing. It is necessary to insist on the horrifying specificity of this process. There has never been a 'subsistence crisis' of the ferocity or global dimension of the current, unfolding catastrophe. The Great Depression, by contrast, had a relatively benign impact upon large parts of the colonial world: a paradox explained by the fact that the collapse of cereal prices allowed millions of Asian and African peasants to consume their own crops or buy cheap wheat. The present crisis is entirely different because of the well-nigh universal impingements of the market on former subsistence farming, the marginalization of domestic foodstuff cultivation by export agriculture, the gigantic displacement of peasant tillers from the land, and expansion of socially parasitic layers (soldiers, bureaucrats). The worst-hit countries are the so-called Fourth World of non-oil producing, primary-product economies which have been afflicted by the triple curse of stagnant or falling prices for their exports, huge oil (and weapons) bills, and astronomical interest rates. In the words of one recent survey, these 'countries are forced to bear a major part of the adjustment required by instabilities in the world economy over which they have no control.' Declining real income, combined with the greater share extracted by American bankers and Arabian oil feudatories, has squeezed the reproduction fund of local oligarchies and military elites precisely at a moment when their appetites for luxury goods, retainers and, above all, weapons are exponentially increasing. The result has often been a terrorist strategy of super-exploitation that has, in turn, evoked desperate resistance. The logic of what is happening to societies like El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Bolivia,

Upper Volta, Niger, Chad, Zaire or the Sudan is in some ways reminiscent of the disasters that overtook European society in the fourteenth century, compounded of exploitation, famine and revolt (but this time with a nuclear plague?). Absolute pauperization is what is fuelling the flames of Islamic revivalism across the Sahel (where nomadic society has collapsed after 2,500 years) and providing the will-power for the incredible revolutionary ordeal in Central America.

Without any new initiative by the USSR, the walls of containment have begun to crumble simultaneously in Africa, Central America, the Middle East, with temporary tremors in the Iberian Peninsula and new cracks in East Asia. Some of the weak links which have recently broken—the Portuguese colonies, Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Nicaragua—were amongst the poorest and least well-fortified bastions of the world market; Iran, in contrast, was a crucial imperial relay with the most advanced military machine in the Third World apart from Israel. From Washington's point of view, these ruptures had a distinctly 'wild' and unpredictable character; particularly because the ability of the USSR to modulate or take 'responsibility' for the level of revolutionary activity in the Third World has decreased with the weakening of the traditional communist movement and the disappearance of most of the USSR's old 'non-capitalist' allies. Another distressing development has, of course, been the emergence of an atavistic religious populism in the Middle East and Sahel which confounds regular Cold War categories.

If these revolutions and popular anti-imperialist upheavals have been unprecedentedly autonomous in their origins from the orthodox Communist movement—or its febrile opponents in Peking—the very success of the United States in playing the China Card and in exploiting its renewed technological-military lead (since 1974) over the USSR, has forced the latter to assume a more militant stance in arming and providing a logistical backstop to the new revolutionary regimes. While prudently cultivating Ostpolitik in Western Europe, the Soviet Union in concert with Cuba undertook in the second half of the last decade bold new military interventions in Africa. It is important to note, however, that this does not so much indicate a defensive geo-political response by Moscow to the growth of the Washington-Peking axis. Meanwhile on the American side, US strategy (via the so-called Carter Doctrine) has come almost full circle back to the impossible project of maintaining a universal American military presence. This time, however, there is a new and more ominous nuclear twist.

### III. The Quest for 'Extended Deterrence'

It is at those moments when the institutional mechanisms stabilizing the Cold War give way under the full assault of the logic of permanent revolution that the time of the Bomb arrives. As Daniel Ellsberg has chronicled, this moment has recurred repeatedly in the course of the Cold War: during the retreat from Chosin Reservoir in 1950, in the last days of Dien Bien Phu in 1953, during the Formosa Straits crisis of 1959, during the 1962 Cuban Missile crisis, at the siege of Khe Sanh in



1968, and, most recently, during Nixon's 'nuclear alert' after the encirclement of the Egyptian Third Army in the Yom Kippur War of 1973.<sup>5</sup> On each occasion it was the United States that moved to the brink—usually without consulting its European allies—and in virtually every case the arena of crisis was in the Third World.

To understand why the present danger of nuclear brinksmanship is again so grave, we need to analyse the specific role of the nuclear arms race in the dynamic of the new Cold War. Such an analysis, however, begs and answers to Edward Thompson's original question: what—first of all—is the Bomb?

As a first approximation let me propose that the strategic arms race must be conceived as a complex, regulative instance of the global class struggle. With the pacification of inter-imperialist military rivalries, permanent mobilization for 'total war' acts as a force-field which defines the terms of contestation between capitalist and post-capitalist social systems. Within the Cold War's aggregate balance of economic, geo-political, ideological and military power, the nuclear build-up plays the double role of preserving the structural cohesion of each bloc and of regulating the conflict between them.

Illustrative of the first function has been the 'alliance-building' role of nuclear weapons deployment in Western Europe. As Thompson's essay makes clear, 'exterminism' has always been an implicit cornerstone of Atlantic unity, and devotion to the Bomb and NATO has been a fundamental precondition for a party's admission to governmental power in the major Western parliamentary states. Thompson exaggerates, however, in imputing a neo-colonial or captive-nation status to Britain or other NATO countries. The 'American yoke' has been worn willingly by European capitalism precisely because it has served its needs so well. American hegemony is exactly that—not mere usurpation or dictation: and the NATO states have derived major benefits from its maintenance. The availability of the American strategic deterrent, together with the stationing of a large American garrison to act as 'tripwire,' has allowed the European allies to devote a minimum of their budgets to support of conventional armies; although, with a population equal to that of the USSR and GNP more than twice as large, they are clearly capable of 'balancing' Soviet conventional forces if they so wished. This has greatly redounded to the competitive advantage of European capital. It has also allowed significantly higher levels of welfare expenditure to contain its more combative working class. At the same time, European and Japanese capital have been able to participate as virtual 'free riders' in the hi-tech spinoffs of the mammoth American military research programme—the primary engine for the generation of applied science in the postwar world. All in all, Atlanticism—as a kind of contemporary Concert of the Powers—has made possible an unprecedented concentration of military might against both international revolution and any potential surge by a domestic far left, while at the same time allowing a more flexible and rational international division of labour amongst the advanced countries, based on the relatively unhindered diffusion of advanced technologies. It has, thus, been the precondition, not just for the survival of European capitalism, but specifically for the reconstruction of European imperialism, with its major

interests in the Mediterranean, Africa, and the Middle East.

The situation on the other side of the Cold War divide is far from symmetrical. The Soviet Union, unlike the United States, has stubbornly refused to permit any proliferation of its nuclear capability amongst other members of the 'Socialist Commonwealth'—a position which played no small part in precipitating the original Sino-Soviet split of 1959–60. At the same time, however, the survival of every revolutionary regime since October has depended at some critical stage upon the countervailing military and economic support of the USSR and its industrial allies. The *primary*, although by no means exclusive, function of the Bomb, therefore, has been to regulate the parameters of Soviet intervention in and support for global class struggles, anti-colonial revolts and nationalist movements. Since 1945 the United States has attempted to exert this *extended deterrence* against the USSR in at least four different ways:

*First, by maintaining the strategic arms race as a form of economic siege warfare against the social system of the USSR and the Comecon bloc.* Although this aspect of the bipolar conflict has all too often been ignored or underestimated, it has increasingly become the focus of long-range American hopes for 'rolling back' or internally disrupting Soviet and allied regimes. Arms competition, grain exports and strict control of Western technological patents all form components of a grand strategy. The projected one-and-a-half-trillion dollar Carter/Reagan defense budget for 1981–85 is ominously the first military build-up in American history to have economic warfare as an overt objective. In a sarcastic but serious play upon the words of Krushchev's famous 'We Will Bury You' speech, Reagan has recently warned the Russians: 'We Will Bust You.'

*Secondly, by forestalling any possibility of Soviet actions in Western Europe comparable to those in the Third World through NATO's strategy of responding to a Soviet conventional campaign with a nuclear blitz.* It should be remembered that first use of nuclear weapons has been the pillar of NATO's strategy since the formation of the Alliance in 1949, and that the European allies have been its most zealous guardians.

*Thirdly, by threatening nuclear retaliation against all Soviet attempts to achieve 'forward basing'*—either as an attempt to redress the American strategic advantage or to extend a regional shield to new revolutionary regimes. (Soviet motives in installing missiles in Cuba in 1962 undoubtedly involved both goals.) In the endless debate about the nuclear numbers game, the Russians have always insisted that it is essential to take into account the unequal geo-military positions of the USSR and the United States. What underlies the claim is the fundamentally asymmetrical character of the overall balance of military power. The United States has immense forward-based nuclear striking capacity, the Soviet Union has none. The USSR is surrounded by thousands of miles of hostile borderlands, from Turkey to Japan, while the United States enjoys the security of three oceans and the largest of all satellite blocs, the Western hemisphere. Finally the United States has twice attempted to bomb 'established' socialist states—Korea and Vietnam—'back into the stone age,' while virtually every important American ally is defended against Soviet intervention not only by forward-based

US nuclear weapons, but also by the tripwire of American soldiery directly connected to the so-called 'ladder of escalation' and the strategic arsenal.

*Fourthly, by constantly buttressing its qualitative strategic-nuclear superiority to limit conventional Soviet military and economic aid to Third World struggles, and to prevent a Soviet response to the potential usage of tactical American nuclear weapons against a Third World foe.* Ideally, as Arms Control and Disarmament Agency head Eugene Rostow (a leading war criminal of early Vietnam days) recently testified, American strategic nuclear superiority should 'permit us to use military force in defence of our interests with comparative freedom if it should become necessary.'<sup>6</sup> The concept of extended deterrence that can be seen at work here is something of a rosetta stone for understanding the underlying logic of the complex of weapons systems and their deployment in a range of modes. For example, the ceaseless accumulation of nuclear overkill has entirely different implications if we conceive 'deterrence' in a defensive or offensive sense. In the first case—understanding deterrence as simply the most effective disincentive to an enemy first-strike—the growth of the nuclear arsenal beyond the 'counter-society' threshold appears absurdly redundant, and Thompson seems more than justified in seeking irrationalist forces and autonomous drives within the weapons systems themselves. In the second case, however—when the strategic systems (ICBM, submarine, bomber) are conceived as the basis of extended deterrence in support of conventional or tactical-nuclear engagement in a subsidiary theatre—the acquisition of 'counter-force' and first-strike capacities assumes quite a different meaning: for what are now projected are disincentives against interference in the 'dominant' side's offensive actions. 'Limited Nuclear War,' 'Flexible Response' or 'Ladder of Escalation' can then become functional deterrents in their very obscurity or absurdity. As a leading New Right strategist has emphasized, 'Much of the deterrent effect of our nuclear force is, in the final analysis, the result of forcing the Soviet Union to live with uncertainty.'

### A New Nuclear Epoch

The problem, of course, is that all this is easier (and more safely) theorized than done. The actual implementation of 'extended deterrence'—that is, the translation of US strategic superiority into effective, 'on-the-ground' supremacy—has been the elusive will-o-the-wisp of every post-war administration and the hub of every major debate on nuclear strategy.

American global strategy passed through four distinct stages from 1945 to 1975: the Truman Doctrine or 'Containment' (1947–52); 'Massive Retaliation' (1953–1960); 'Flexible Response' (1961–70); the Nixon Doctrine (1970–75). All were different solutions to the common quest for extended deterrence. What is the emergent doctrine of the *fifth* strategic epoch that has now opened? In particular, what is the relationship between the strategic nuclear build-up and renewed US military intervention in the Third World? The distinctive features of the Reagan strategy seem to be these:

*First*, the Administration is intransigently opposed to any new 'multilateralization' of international politics. It

has opposed the so-called 'North-South dialogue,' not only because of a frozen heart, but also because it fears the emergence of any new axes of diplomacy or political-economic cooperation that might increase the autonomy of the EEC vis-à-vis the United States.

*Secondly*, the New Right and its hawkish allies in the Democratic Party (including most of the AFL-CIO executive) have made the restoration of American strategic superiority their central and overriding objective. 'Superiority' for them, however, has little to do with any quest for a fail-safe protective deterrent around the United States itself. Rather it consists of acquiring the means of projecting US nuclear strength as a global umbrella, especially over the Third World. The virtues of the \$30 billion dollar MX system, in tandem with MIRVed Trident-2s, Cruise missiles, Stealth Bombers, is that it would supposedly provide the Pentagon with a selective ability to knock out any or all levels of Soviet conventional and 'theatre' forces. The dangerous implication here is not so much the likelihood of an all-out American first-strike, as a US ability to impose on the USSR a de facto recognition of 'limited nuclear war.' The deployment of strategic superiority to attain what Haig calls 'escalation dominance'—i.e. the ability to confront the other side with the choice between acceptance of a limited nuclear *fait accompli* or total escalation to societal suicide—is what links counter-force to counter-insurgency.

*Thirdly*, the Rapid Deployment Force is radically different from the Kennedy-era special warfare forces in one outstanding regard: its deployment openly integrates a tactical nuclear backstop. As Daniel Ellsberg has pointed out, the RDF is in many respects a kind of 'portable Dien Bien Phu' waiting to be encircled and besieged. The difference, of course, is that the Pentagon is now expressly prepared to rescue the RDF with tactical nuclear weapons.

*Fourthly*, in face of the potential vulnerability of key semi-developed relay states like Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Nigeria, and perhaps even Brazil, the US is moving towards a more intimate embrace with the bunker regimes in Israel and South Africa. One of the gambits of the new Administration has been its exploration of a possible 'South Atlantic Alliance' between the Southern Cone dictatorships and South Africa which would be closely linked to NATO-Atlantic and US-Indian Ocean war plans. Such an alliance would be an implicitly nuclear one and clearly emphasizes the growing danger that Israel and South Africa (as well potentially of Brazil, Argentina and Pakistan) might in the future become nuclear surrogates for the United States in regional Third World arenas.

The Reagan strategy, in other words, appears to be based on an extremely dangerous widening of 'flexible response' to include limited nuclear war in Third World theatres, under the umbrella of a buttressed counter-force superiority, in a general context of increased bipolar tension and a tightened American command structure over NATO. In one sense the goal of this strategy is actually deterrent—i.e. to constrain the Soviet Union in 'force deployments' and in 'geopolitical expansion.' On the other hand, actual scenarios of nuclear warfare are all too grimly imaginable. As I have said earlier, one of my chief criticisms of any unilateral



emphasis on the 'irrational' dimensions of the exterminist thrust, is precisely its elision of the *purposeful* escalations and strategically contrived confrontations of the Cold War. Perhaps the maximum exterminist danger in the present period would concentrate in one or both of the following Third World centred scenarios: (I) The employment of tactical nuclear weapons by American Rapid Deployment Forces or one of the US's rogue allies against a Third World revolutionary or nationalist regime that itself possesses relatively sophisticated conventional armaments: e.g. Libya, Iran or North Korea. (II) The Reagan Administration's persistent threats to take military action against Cuba (in violation of the 1962 agreement that was the cornerstone of detente), or its support for military infiltration (via a Savimbi or Pol Pot) against African and Indochinese allies of the USSR, might prompt the Soviet leadership to again consider the forward basing of nuclear weapons, leading to a rerun—or much worse—of October 1962.

The possibility or otherwise of nuclear crises breaking out in the next year in the Third World, however, will be inextricably bound up with the tempo of the class struggle and the emergence or absence of new pre-revolutionary situations in the South. Thus today the danger to Cuba is acute because of the growth of people's war throughout Central America, while the extension of Libyan influence in Africa has been based on the disintegration of the traditional economy in the Sudanic belt.

A different set of structural conditions threatens crisis in the so-called 'newly industrialized countries' of Latin America and East Asia. While it remains true that the semi-industrialized countries of Latin America contain their own 'fourth worlds' in the form of vast and severely underdeveloped rural regions (Southern Mexico, North-East Brazil), the real focal point of social revolution in these societies is more likely to be their gigantic, hypertrophic cities. Despite an irresistible rise in popular expectations amongst the enlarged working classes of these countries, none has yet made a real transition to the 'Fordist' unification of mass production and mass consumption that characterizes the economies of the OECD bloc. Moreover there is a little sign that any of the political conditions could be mobilized which would allow a restructuring of production away from export markets or middle-class consumer durables towards truly mass domestic goods. The increasing addiction of these countries to 'debt-led' growth reinforces their need to preserve or expand their international competitive capacity, while it simultaneously increases the invigilation of OECD banks over their domestic policies. The resulting pressures to force wages down and reduce social expenditure—radically more severe than under even the most right-wing of the current OECD regimes—are likely to close the space for reform or partial democratization. In the short-run the enormous indebtedness of these countries could bring the international financial system itself into jeopardy, and provoke new forms of US intervention. But in the longer-run the greatest danger to Western capitalism is the emergence of autonomous, self-organized labour movements in these countries. If the centre of gravity of the international class struggle were to shift to them in the 1980s, it would have immense repercussions for the entire system of world politics. The United States would not

resign itself lightly to the loss of any of the major semi-industrial countries; here might lie the seeds of another *causus belli* for World War Three, if a powerful movement for peace and solidarity with the people of the South is not built within American society today.

#### IV. Actually Existing Exterminism

As future megadeaths multiply to incomprehensibility in their underground crypts, present slaughters are dulled in our conscience and made matter-of-fact by repetition and sheer enormity. Twenty years of 'revolution in the counter-revolution'—to borrow Debray's still apt phrase—have produced a penultimate apparatus of 'conventional' terror. The old-fashioned technicians of human extermination that yesterday organized 'Operation Phoenix' in Vietnam or ran a clandestine mission or two over the border in Cambodia, are now rendering their crew-cut (but slightly grey) service in the barracks of San Salvador or Guatemala City. No bastion of the free world is too poor or humble not to possess the ultimate status symbol of America's trust, the airborne weaponry for rural fusillades. Meanwhile in the cities—many cities—torture is not only routinized, it is now computerized. Counter-revolution no longer simply hunts down revolutionaries, it preemptively destroys families, villages, whole social strata. The costs of making revolution in these lands would be unbearable if the costs of not making it were not higher. This is the actually existing exterminism.

Edward Thompson's passionate call to protest and survive should not be deflected by radical platitudes or appeals to Marxist orthodoxy. But it can be sharpened by a more acute attention to the interlinkages of the actual struggles unfolding across five continents. Whatever the errors of its immaturity, the 'New Left' should not be disparaged for having emphasized the dependence of the hopes of socialism in the Northern hemisphere upon the desperate and courageous battles being waged on the other side of the world. It will not weaken the resolve of peace campaigners in Western Europe and North America to understand more accurately and realistically why the struggle against the Pershing and Cruise missiles, the MX and B-1, will lessen the dangers of a holocaust in the Third World, as well as the First. The new movements for peace must mobilize the deepest levels of human solidarity, rather than pine nostalgically for the restoration of a lost European or Northern civilization. And within these new movements, the Marxist left must continue to honour the injunction of the Communist Manifesto to 'point out and bring to the front the common interests of the entire proletariat, independently of all nationality.'■

<sup>1</sup>*Beyond the Cold War*, p. 30.

<sup>2</sup>*Beyond the Cold War*, p. 34.

<sup>3</sup>Hamza Alavi, 'State and Class Under Peripheral Capitalism,' Alavi and Teodor Shanin, eds., *Introduction to the Sociology of the Developing Countries*, London 1982.

<sup>4</sup>Henry Trofimenko 'The Third World and US-Soviet Competition: A Soviet View,' *Foreign Affairs*, summer 1981.

<sup>5</sup>Daniel Ellsberg 'A Call to Mutiny,' in E.P. Thompson and Dan Smith, *Protest and Survive* (US edition), New York 1981.

<sup>6</sup>Senate Confirmation Hearings, 1981.

<sup>7</sup>Jan M. Lodal, 'Deterrence and Nuclear Strategy,' *Daedalus*, Fall 1980. See also Kenneth Adelman, 'Beyond MAD-ness,' *Policy Review*, No. 17, Summer 1981.



# The Stagflation Crisis: *Two Views*

Jim Devine \*

**S**amuel Bowles, David Gordon, and Thomas Weisskopf, *Beyond the Wasteland: A Democratic Alternative to Economic Decline*, Garden City, New York: Anchor Press, 1983.

Phillip Armstrong, Andrew Glyn, and John Harrison, *Capitalism Since World War II: The Making and the Breakup of the Great Boom*, London: Fontana, 1984.

What were the origins of the severe crisis of U.S. and world capitalism that began around 1970? Why did the "Great Boom" of the 1950s and 1960s turn into the "Great Stagflation"? The books under review present two different answers to these questions by radical economists.

Samuel Bowles, David Gordon, and Thomas Weisskopf are three leftist U.S. economists. *Beyond the Wasteland* (BTW) examines the origins of the Great Stagflation in the U.S., attacks the trickle-down programs proposed by the Right and Center, and presents a "democratic alternative to economic decline." Phillip Armstrong, Andrew Glyn, and John Harrison are important theorists in the U.K.-based Conference of Socialist Economists. *Capitalism Since World War II* (CSWW2) is both more and less ambitious than *Beyond the Wasteland*. It details the political-economic history of all of the advanced capitalist countries—not simply the U.S. as in BTW—and goes all the way back to the post-War reconstruction period. But though they analyze and criticize existing programs (from Thatcher to Reagan to Mitterand), they make no proposals of their own.

We will start closer to home, with BTW's view of the crisis of the 1970's and 1980's. The problem, say Bowles, Gordon, and Weisskopf, is not that we live in a "zero-sum society" (following neo-liberal economist Lester Thurow) where consumption and workers' living standards must be cut to promote investment.<sup>1</sup> The "capital shortage" theory, which suggests that more investment funds need to be generated for the U.S. economy to get back on its feet, is inadequate as well. Nor can specific institutions (OPEC, government, monopolies, unions) be blamed. Rather, the problems result from the systemic and historic breakdown of the "social system of accumulation" established after World War II: the end of the U.S. economy's domination vis-a-vis competing advanced capitalist countries and raw-material-producing Third World countries; the termination of the implicit accords between big capital and big labor, and

between capital and the citizenry concerning public welfare programs. The collapse of this three-part structure—the rise of international competition, Third-World liberation movements, working-class resistance, and citizen's movements (from Nader to anti-nuke)—knocked the system flat.

For Bowles, Gordon, and Weisskopf, this collapse meant slowing productivity growth, which in turn encouraged the decline of real after-tax wages and profit rates. A growing fight over the production and distribution of income resulted, causing serious inflation even in the face of soaring unemployment. Because of the alleged abundance of available capital and the blatant wastefulness of the U.S. economy, Bowles, Gordon and Weisskopf argue that there are sufficient resources to finance recovery through their "Economic Bill of Rights" and to move "beyond the wasteland." (In 1980, they calculate, 45% of the Gross National Product was wasteful [BTW, p.177].) While we will focus on their analysis of the Great Stagflation, leaving the details of their program for discussion elsewhere, it should be clear that the success of the "Economic Bill of Rights" depends on their vision of the economic crisis.

Because Armstrong, Glyn, and Harrison begin their analysis with the years immediately after World War II, they review a broader range of different positions. We will focus on their view of the origins of the crisis of the 1970s. These authors see the crisis as more of an international phenomenon than do Bowles, Gordon, and Weisskopf. They also see the crisis more in terms of problems of capitalist accumulation rather than as a seemingly accidental event, as in BTW. Sharing with BTW an emphasis on the relative decline of U.S. economic might within the advanced capitalist world, they see that decline as "generated by the boom" of the 1950s and 1960s. More importantly, they locate the origins of the Great Stagflation in capitalism's tendency to over-accumulate, to expand too much for too long to allow continued prosperity. Over-accumulation leads to over-heating, creating the conditions spawning both strike waves (in some countries) and a falling profit rate. The emphasis on over-accumulation makes *Capitalism*

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Since World War II superior to *BTW*.

The basic theoretical problem with *Beyond the Wasteland* is its superficial understanding of the laws of motion of capitalism. Perhaps in over-reaction to those Marxist economists who are always predicting economic disaster from abstract analyses, the authors are much too concrete. The key element of their story, the collapse of the "social structure of accumulation" that stabilized capitalism for long periods is not explained.

For Bowles, Weisskopf and Gordon, the only driving force of capitalism is the growth of social movements, which (inevitably?) challenge the structures of domination. Despite efforts to avoid scape-goating popular forces, they present a view of the working class and other popular groups as highly organized and militant, and, worse, as responsible for the crisis. Corporate attacks are thus labelled a "counteroffensive." The allegedly increasingly restive workforce supposedly forced capitalists to use more and more supervisors in order to maintain control [*BTW*, P. 130]. In short, the *BTW* analysis seems a variant of rich people's perpetual complaints about the "servant problem," dressed up with leftist jargon.

CSWW2, hardly a book that de-emphasizes class struggle, finds no evidence of working class revolt contributing to U.S. economic decline [see ch. 12]. Bowles, Gordon, and Weisskopf's "demonstration" that worker militance created the need for greater supervision is based on a deeply flawed measure of the intensity of supervision [*BTW*, p. 130]. As part of the "supervisory" workforce, it includes research, development, advertising, distribution, and other employees not supervising production. One cannot say from this data that the "intensity of supervision" increased. Rather, corporate overhead costs increased relative to domestic production costs.

Reaching an even more absurd level, *BTW* even blames rising materials prices in the 1970s on "rising popular resistance to corporate domination" [p. 135-138]. This ignores the important (and profitable) role of the Seven Sisters oil corporations in jacking up oil prices, the most important component of materials price rises. OPEC, hardly a "popular force," was far from solely responsible. Also allowing and encouraging higher materials prices (and not just for oil), was rapidly increasing demand in the early 1970s; caused partly by the growing synchronization of the business cycles of the advanced capitalist countries, and partly by the Viet Nam war [see CSWW2, ch. 13].

More fundamentally, Bowles, Gordon, and Weisskopf ignore the contradictions within the capitalist class which set the context for social conflicts. Capitalists do not passively follow the wants of consumers, as these authors' Keynesian theory of investment suggests [*BTW*, p. 229]. On this point, CSWW2's emphasis on the problem of over-accumulation is vastly superior. Even though Armstrong, Glyn, and Harrison emphasize many of the same events and examine much the same type of data as the U.S. authors, they see the development of social conflicts of the 1970s not as an autonomous force, but as stimulated by over-expansion in the face of limited supplies of labor-power [CSWW2, ch. 11]. CSWW2's view of the rise of raw material prices is similar. The only flaw in their argument is their failure to analyze the fundamental economic bases that drive the

system to over-accumulate.

Competition within the capitalist class drives the system to accumulate and sometimes over-accumulate.<sup>2</sup> Capitalists must expand to survive, must aggressively seek profit opportunities, in fear of losing to their rivals. While capitalist companies with monopolistic advantages need not expand, no monopoly position is permanent. Under capitalism, technology, demand, and social relations of production are always changing, undermining old monopolies. So capitalism surges ahead, no matter what the social costs or the crises that result.

Because their focus is more global, Armstrong, Glyn, and Harrison do not discuss the development of the crisis in the U.S. enough to satisfy the readers of *Against the Current*, or to present a complete alternative to Bowles, Gordon, and Weisskopf. Nor is their theoretical framework as coherent as one would wish. But they present evidence that gives us a deeper understanding of the Great Stagflation than *BTW*'s, and they link this evidence to an analysis of the dynamics of capitalism.<sup>3</sup> Such an analysis goes back before the "oil crisis" of 1973-4. After all, by 1973 the profit rate had already fallen drastically from its 1966 peak [CSWW2, p. 257].

There was more to the political economy of the post-World War II U.S. than Bowles, Gordon, and Weisskopf's social structure of accumulation. After World War II, U.S. capitalists temporarily benefitted from industrial and military hegemony within the capitalist world.<sup>4</sup> It is this privileged position that allowed the relative social peace (*BTW*'s domestic "accords") of the 1950s and early 1960s. But this dominance ("lack of competitive pressure") encouraged wasteful spending of surplus value on the military, advertising, and unnecessary product differentiation (yearly style changes for cars, etc.). In the early 1960s, for example, the U.S. devoted 40 percent of their research and development on space and military purposes, much more than Western Europe and especially Japan [CSWW2, p. 224]. Finally, as Armstrong, Glyn and Harrison point out, the U.S. built up its stock of fixed means of production around World War II. At that time, this fixed capital embodied the most advanced technology. But monopoly privileges encouraged U.S. capitalists to protect rather than augment domestic investments. These privileges also gave them surplus funds to invest outside of the country [CSWW2, p. 222-6].

By the early 1970s, this process ended with the increasing relative obsolescence of the U.S. industrial structure (*deindustrialization*). Rising international competition from less obsolete capital—not only from Japan and West Germany, but from foreign subsidiaries of U.S.-based multinationals as well—combined with rising raw material prices to reduce the U.S. terms of trade with the rest of the world. Thus, the rate of profit on domestic investment fell, encouraging both slow accumulation and spiraling inflation.

This alternative view (partly based on CSWW2) shares many important empirical points with Bowles, Gordon and Weisskopf. But several weaknesses in *BTW*'s presentation indicate that their views must be severely modified or abandoned in favor of the "deindustrialization" view. It was not simply that people (at home and in the Third World) woke up to the abuses of capitalism. The US capitalist class fouled its own nest.

At the center of the *BTW* story is the slowdown of

productivity (the effectiveness of labor) during the 1970s.<sup>5</sup> On the purely theoretical level, Bowles, Gordon, and Weisskopf's explanation of this phenomenon [BTW, p. 124-148] cannot be rejected out of hand. It is true that low worker motivation and popular resistance to corporate abuse can hurt productivity. But these authors ignore the normal determination of productivity growth (what Marx called "relative surplus value") in the process of capitalist accumulation after the first stages of the industrial revolution.<sup>6</sup> In the words of Armstrong, Glyn, and Harrison, productivity growth mostly arises from "the rapid installation of new, high-productivity machinery and the fast scrapping of old, low-productivity machines" [CSWW2, p. 175]. It is the slowing of relative surplus value extraction that leads to slowing of productivity growth.<sup>7</sup>

It is no big surprise that Bowles, Gordon, and Weisskopf's statistical test of the sources of productivity slowdown [BTW, p. 395-398] does not fit any alternative view. Because the waste described by the deindustrialization theory represents a damper on productivity growth only cumulatively and in the long run, its role is hard to see using only comparisons over time. Since the relative impact of waste is close to constant for decades in any one country, its role can only be captured using international comparisons. Bowles, Gordon, and Weisskopf do note that countries (like the U.S.) that spend the most on the military lose in international competition [BTW, p. 81]. But the reason for this connection is unclear: could it be that military spending, by wasting investment resources (surplus value), saps productivity growth? This view is elaborated in Robert GeGrasse's *Military Expansion, Economic Decline* (ch. 2).<sup>8</sup>

Though Bowles, Gordon, and Weisskopf point to the falling profit rate in the U.S. [BTW, p. 51], they downplay its importance. No "capital shortage" exists, they say, since corporations have excess capacity and sufficient access to funds [BTW, p. 57-8]. But their evidence, a falling financial cost of investment (the real interest rate), does not show that capital is abundant. An examination of the authors' graphs [BTW, p. 51, 58] indicates that between 1966 and 1979, the profit rate (the benefits to capital of investing) fell much more than did the real interest rate (by more than 5 percentage points)! This is a clear sign of a "capital shortage"—not arising from the laws of nature but from the rule of profit.

The deindustrialization theory is also superior to the *Beyond the Wasteland* explanation because it acknowledges that some regions (such as the rustbowl of North and East) suffer more from stagnation. The old-style "monopoly" industries (e.g., steel and auto) were located in these areas. It is surprising to find this book dwelling almost entirely on the national level, or on abstract discussions of individual markets without mentioning the uneven development of the crisis.

Moreover, Bowles, Gordon, and Weisskopf ignore the international nature of the capitalist crisis. Again, this is the strength of Armstrong, Glyn, and Harrison. They point out that the crisis is not simply one of U.S., but of all the advanced countries, not to mention the whole capitalist world. Over-accumulation, they argue, created problems for all of the advanced nations: tight labor markets, high raw materials prices, a squeeze on profits, slowing productivity growth, and falling rates of

profit [CSWW2, ch. 11]. Not only that, but the rise of competition was general, eroding profit margins in all of the advanced countries [CSWW2, p. 252]. The relative decline of the U.S. was at best a mixed blessing for its competitors. Armstrong, Glyn, and Harrison also describe the evolution of a new, more free-wheeling, international monetary system from the old U.S.-dominated system.

For Bowles, Gordon, and Weisskopf, severe inflation in the face of disastrous unemployment arose from the conflict over the distribution of the stagnant product (the wage-price spiral) plus political stalemate [BTW, p. 116-9]. Again it seems that the working class and other non-capitalist groups stimulated the inflation. Armstrong, Glyn, and Harrison present a more realistic and more complex view of inflation [CSWW2, pp. 263-68]. First, over-accumulation and high raw materials prices stimulated the wage-price spiral by threatening profits: capitalists raised prices to restore profits, inducing workers to push for higher wages, which recreated the profit squeeze. Second, it was credit expansion that allowed the increased prices. In turn, that expansion was encouraged by the falling rate of profit and the capitalist need for funds. Finally, the new international monetary system encouraged price increases (especially after 1973).

Unfortunately, like the U.S. authors, Armstrong, Glyn, and Harrison over-estimate political control of the credit system. This system is increasingly creating credit instruments (such as the Eurocurrencies) that take control of aggregate demand further from political hands. Money and credit supplies are becoming harder to control.

In conclusion, Armstrong, Glyn, and Harrison present a stronger analysis of the origins of the Great Stagflation than do Bowles, Gordon, and Weisskopf. Much more than the U.S. authors, CSWW2 combines a strong analysis of historical factors with an understanding of the inherent contradictions of capitalism. ■

1. See *The Zero-Sum Society*, Basic Books.

2. See Jim Devine, "Underconsumption, Over-Investment, and the Origins of the Great Depression" (*Review of Radical Political Economics*, Summer 1983) for a more complete analysis of the forces driving capitalism into crises.

3. See Jim Devine, "The Structural Crisis of US Capitalism," *Southwest Economy and Society*, Fall, 1982. For a wealth of data that fits this view hypothesis, see Barry Bluestone and Bennett Harrison, *The Deindustrialization of America*, Basic Books, 1982.

4. This privileged position was described in Baran and Sweezy's *Monopoly Capital* (Monthly Review Press, 1966). Though the description seems roughly accurate, the analysis of *Monopoly Capital* is not. See the article in note 2.

5. Even such strong critics of the data on productivity as Victor Perlo now accept some slowdown in productivity growth in manufacturing. See "The False Claim of Declining Productivity and Its Political Use," *Science and Society*, vol. 56, no. 3, Fall 1982.

6. See Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. I, ch. 12.

7. This explanation fits with research by Martin N. Baily ("Productivity and the Services of Capital and Labor," *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity*, 1981, no. 1) which claims that the productivity slowdown can be explained mostly by the poor quality of the US stock of fixed capital, not by militant or lazy workers. It is interesting that bourgeois economists are less willing to blame worker "laziness" or "revolt" for productivity than are Bowles, Gordon, and Weisskopf.

8. M.E. Sharpe, expanded edition, 1983.





## What the Campesinos Say

by Tim Brennan \*

**"**In reality, I said the farm administration was deficient to avoid saying it was pure shit," said Jesus Brizeño. We were in a union meeting in a makeshift shack in a Southern jungle village of Nicaragua, and we were uneasy. These were not the words we expected to hear. This farm administration, after all, represented the government that had greeted us in Managua with front-page coverage in the daily newspapers. Its members were supposed to be the local leaders of the revolution.

But being in Nicaragua as members of an International Work Brigade did have that advantage over journalists and tourists. For us, after a few weeks sleeping and working with the fieldhands on a state farm, there was little chance for performances. For them as well. As much as possible for North Americans on a brief trip, we saw the locals more or less as they were, in conditions as close to normal as is possible in a country at war—not fresh after a contra bombing, not on a day trip from the International Hotel, and not on the streets of the capital, but in the process of rural daily life, the way most Nicaraguans live. Still, it was with some initial confusion that we found ourselves at the union hall listening to a bitter fight over vacation pay. Not until we heard the farmers of Morrillo, did we see how much disagreement a supporter of the revolution can still have.

The previous week, a string of random interviews with vegetable stall owners, high school students, cooks, and basketball players, had produced a large ratio in favor of the revolution, with a sizeable chunk actively committed to defending the post-Somoza road of the FSLN specifically. There had been others who blamed the new government for food shortages, and one who even said the contra leader Eden Pastora was his friend; but hundreds others who, without any defensiveness and in their own words, not only identified with the new land reform, health care and Civilian Defense Committees, but who associated these gains with the FSLN leadership. For them, the "revolution" was not only their own, but one that had been organized by individuals like Carlos Fonseca (the Sandinista founder killed by the National Guard in 1976), and protected now by "Los Muchachos"—the kids that fill the ranks of the popular army.

The US work brigades joined volunteers from all over Europe to harvest crops in a Nicaragua at war. We returned convinced that Nicaragua today faces not only the mining, pillaging, and sabotage of the US-supported terrorists from the North, but also the disapproval of the American public which is not allowed to see what everyday life is really like there. The disapproval, of course, is what makes the funding of the contras possible, and is too often based on misconceptions of well-meaning Americans who feel duped when they discover any instances of incompetence or injustice in a government they have been supporting from afar.

The battle for public opinion has centered on the idea of "freedom of expression," which, especially as the Nicaraguan elections draw nearer, has become crucial for the US government in casting suspicion on the Sandinista process. But "freedom of expression" has never been spelled out by the critics of the revolution. Of what does freedom consist?

The detailed legalistic reports of Amnesty International and Americas Watch list instances of arrest and detention under the emergency "Public Order Law," but (as they point out) only in the context of "frequent armed attacks against Nicaraguan government personnel and installations, as well as Nicaraguan towns and the civilian population"—in other words, an actual state of emergency. Yet many believe from such reports that an atmosphere of repression exists there, and that channels of dissent have been destroyed. This isn't so. As a former trade unionist, I want to consider the question by relating the experiences of a recent international work brigade in a Sandinista trade union meeting. The account may be valuable as a personal example of what democracy means in Nicaragua—an example of what "freedom of expression" might mean.

We worked on a small cattle farm in Morrillo, Rio San Juan, a stretch of lowland jungle just north of the Costa

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Rican border. As under Somoza, American reporters have ignored the region, looking instead at the North where both the contra activity and the traditional bases of Sandinista and support have been more intense. In some ways, though, the South is even more crucial to Nicaragua's future.

Once 70% owned by Somoza, the area now displays the heaviest concentration of state-owned "units of production," the state farms that together make up *Zona Especial III*, so called because of its importance for projected development of the vast tracts of unpopulated jungle known as the Atlantic Coast, but comprising almost half of Nicaragua's land mass.

Significantly, Morrillo's workers played no role in the insurrection, and they are only just now learning about the revolution. By the standards of a Leon carpenter or a fruit seller in Esteli, the Rio San Juan was shockingly poor, having before the revolution the largest illiteracy and infant mortality rates in the entire country. Both because of its strategic importance and low political level, the area is a crucial testing ground for the success of Sandinista policy in the provinces—a test now being applied by the increasingly menacing forces of Eden Pastora who operates in the region but who, despite the image here, has nothing like the rural support the US press implies he has. (The same can be said of all the opposition political parties in Nicaragua).

We did meet a few people who sympathized with Pastora, and who believed (contrary to all reports) that his forces do not kill innocent villagers. It is significant that these sympathizers said so openly and without apparent fear. Still, in the Rio San Juan, his home turf, Pastora seemed generally hated, referred to typically in conversation simply as "el traidor." On the town wall in the middle of the village is painted in large black letters: "Paredon Para Eden" (Execution Wall for Eden; this seemed to be meant figuratively, however, since capital punishment, even of contras, is against the policies of the revolution).

Before the FSLN took Managua, Morrillo had no unions. Now it is completely organized by the Association of Rural Workers (ATC), a pro-government trade union whose origins go back to the Catholic "Delegates of the Word" of the late 1960's, whose organizers in the insurrections of 1978 and 1979 worked along with the FSLN guerillas, and in large part became Sandinistas themselves. With the exception of the Sandinista Confederation of Workers (CST), which covers the urban trades, the ATC is the largest union in Nicaragua, a fact that hardly pleases certain labor figures in the US.

In principle, the state of the trade unions in any country has the right to be a gauge of that country's success or failure in a major area of human rights. This is especially true in a country that has just experienced a popular revolution. Instinctively, the right-wing of the US labor movement has recognized this. In a recent newsletter, William Doherty, Jr. of the AFL-CIO's Institute for Free Labor Development, claims that "Nicaragua has been subjected to an ever increasing assault on its trade union freedoms," harming rival unions like the Confederation of Trade Union Unifications (CUS), for example, an AFL-CIO affiliate.

Sam Shube of the Young Social Democrats (which, incidentally, helped sponsor Eden Pastora's New York fund-raising tour) asserts that the Sandinistas have

declared strikes illegal, intimidated oppositionists by mobilizing "mobs," and broken unions by importing as many as 12,000 Cuban scabs. Allegations like these have fed the fears of even liberal Congressman like Michael Barnes and Stephen Solarz who still oppose Reagan's illegal aid to the contras, but who agree with the recent State Department's Human Rights Report that "freedom of expression" is declining in Nicaragua.

It is quite true that under the Emergency Law passed in March 1982, strikes in Nicaragua are illegal. It is also true that the Law was passed in response to an intensifying invasion of their country which has so far claimed 6,800 lives, and led to serious economic sabotage of grain and oil storage facilities, pipelines, transport, and croplands, and that combined with a US embargo, the mining of Nicaraguan harbors, and increased pressure on other countries (notably Mexico) that do business with Nicaragua, as well as the fact that much of the Nicaraguan workforce not killed in the revolution has had to leave their jobs to fight unproductively on the borders, the Emergency Law has widely been thought necessary.

US labor critics must have a short memory to forget their own no-strike agreement under the vastly better conditions of World War II. Far right-wing union leaders in Nicaragua, whose members have been defecting to the larger pro-government organizations in recent years, have challenged the law, as have some far left groups such as the Workers Front. There has nonetheless been almost universal cooperation with the Law.

The charge of Cuban scabbing, on the other hand, appears to be a complete fabrication, designed to create fear of communist infiltration after the help offered by thousands of Cuban medical, technical, and military volunteers who joined thousands of other volunteers from Canada, West Germany, Italy and other Western nations in support of the revolution. Using Shube's logic, the US International Work Brigades would be as guilty as the Cubans of scabbing. Interestingly, the Nicaraguans paid the Brigades union wages, which (in our case) were donated immediately to a local school project.

Assessing Sandinista trade union policy must begin with their early moves to extend the right to organize. Under Somoza, the only unions given legal rights were those that openly or implicitly accepted Somoza rule. The social democratic CUS was one of these, and its former privileges have since seriously compromised it in the eyes of other unionists. By any standard, the Sandinistas have nothing like a monopoly on the trade unions. The non-Sandinista unions include the Social Christian Confederation of Nicaraguan Workers, the Communist General Confederation of Labor, and the far left Workers Front, which led a sugar mill strike in 1980 against the government. There are several others, although many of the participating craft unions after 1979 broke from the older confederations to join the CST.

Jesus Brizeño is typical of the workers that have given the ATC credibility in the Rio San Juan. A twenty-two year old fieldworker, Jesus was an advisor to the local union leadership for its annual report, although he holds no formal position. Including topics such as "Politics and Ideology," "The Social Aspects of Labor," and "Defense," the report mirrors the close relationship of



local government and union in Morrillo, and is precisely the sort of thing figures like Doherty and Shube point to as Sandinista "indoctrination."

Jesus believes this view overlooks the attitudes of the campesinos themselves. Do they see the ATC as a government union, or even more, as a concerted attempt to deprive them of basic union rights? The meetings I attended helped to answer that.

The meetings took place in a crumbly one-room wooden schoolhouse. Typically, the wooden shutters were thrown back letting the sun in. In one, Political Secretary Narciso Chamorro, about 45 in a soiled button shirt and baggy Levis, addressed the group after Jesus' report. Following is an edited transcription of the actual discussion that took place:

"Are there any questions? You know you have to better the directorate of the union. You have to be sure we are fulfilling our tasks. That means taking notes at the meetings, and pointing out our mistakes."

Many of us knew the campesinos attending the meeting since we had been working with them. Most of them support the revolution, although critically; they did their militia duty at the end of the workday, travelled far to get to the meetings (which had not been a part of their routine under Somoza), and accepted the argument that national sovereignty entailed sacrifice. A few aspired to leadership roles in the revolution. Jesus was one of these, as well as an impressive 23-yr old orator named Cesar who had just returned from Cuba (although the opinions about Cuba, and specifically about whether the Nicaraguan revolution should emulate Cuba, were very diverse. To take an extreme, some graffiti in the village square of San Carlos read: "We will die before we become slaves of the Soviet Union"). At the union meeting, though, business was still business, and the campesinos took Narciso's invitation very literally.

One named Manuel began: "It's a very strange thing. Here you ask us to work more and to produce more, but you don't speak about raising our wages. They told us they would give us a vacation, when was it...? December 15 [It is now January 7]. We work every day, and really, these vacations, we need them."

Narciso countered: "You are right. But we were only telling you what the farm administration told us...This problem is being discussed at the level of the Ministry of Labor. Don't think it's being talked about only on this *empresa* here. You all know of the aggression against us on the national level. They [the administration] are considering, if they can't make good on wages, that maybe they'll make good on other things. We have proposed that the *empresa* hand out boots, that clothes be sold at lower prices, and that consumer goods be sold at much lower prices." "Yes, yes *compañero*," replied Manuel, "but the point is still the same. The administration had tricked us. And where is the administration now?" he demanded. "They should be at these meetings."

The union leadership could only agree, as the words of Jesus opening this article show. As we discovered later, the argument had qualifying undercurrents. For example, the farm at Morrillo had recently joined a new *empresa* whose workers happened also to be scheduled for vacations. To close down Morrillo in the Rio San Juan's subsistence economy would seriously hurt those living in nearby San Jose and San Miguelito. A strike never seemed to be the objective—just that the appeal

for sacrifice could not be taken for granted.

Another important piece of background information was this: even though Somoza had formally owned this former wilderness, his complete neglect of its people had allowed a few local entrepreneurs to control private plots of land in his absence. In effect, as squatters, they held land. The Sandinista development projects in the area thus appeared to these few as an expropriation. Although the Nicaraguan economy is still 60% private, and although the economy has excelled in the successful balance of private and cooperative farming (as evidenced by an unexpected overall growth rate in 1980 and 1981), the Rio San Juan happens to be a region designated for experimental state enterprises. For the entrepreneurs, Somoza's neglect seemed almost a good thing, and the complete lack of medical care, education, modern farm implements, atrocious infant mortality rates, and (even by Nicaragua's standards) substandard transportation, seemed comparatively unimportant. Naturally, for the population as a whole, this was not true.

Finally, some of the problems with the farm administration seemed not to be political at all. Jaime and Aristides, the two men who composed the administration, did show bad faith and poor communication, but they probably only reflected a larger disjunction between what the government wanted to provide its workers and what (under the conditions of war) it was possible to provide.

Although the first response of North Americans in Morrillo's union hall was an unpleasant recognition that the revolution's local leaders had let the workers down, and had even made some of them distrustful, it showed at the same time an honesty and a willingness to debate, even in the presence of important outside observers. Such openness does not exist in my experience in the union meetings of the UAW, UFT and the United Steelworkers.

The practical union rights I witnessed, showed concretely what status "freedom of expression" really enjoys in Nicaragua. People are not only free to dissent, and to do so carrying the arms issued to them by the government, but the government has helped build an organization providing a formal outlet for collective disapproval of its own policies—a real, advocacy organization. This process would be clearer to people in the US if they could stop thinking of the "Sandinistas" as outsiders or aliens above and in charge of the Nicaraguan people. Visitors to most parts of Nicaragua know this is not true, but once back in the US the framework of debate demands that this point be made repeatedly.

Arguments about the excellence or perfectability of the Nicaraguan form of government are truly not necessary now. A much more important task is to convince Americans that an invasion of Nicaragua would be as immoral and as criminal as it would be futile. We have to begin first of all from some very basic points. In El Salvador and in Guatemala, labor activists are simply gunned down. In Honduras, they are jailed and disappeared. In Nicaragua since 1979, as a direct result of the revolution, laborers for the first time have the right to meet without fear and (as Narciso said) "better the directorate"—to work at bridging the inevitable distance between the national leadership of a country and its very poor ■

# "Without Revolutionary Theory..." DSA and the Economic Crisis

by Steve Downs

**W**ithin a few short years of its founding the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA—the result of the merger in 1980 of the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee and the New American Movement) has become one of the most influential organizations on the US left. The influence of its politics extends considerably beyond its own membership through its work in the Democratic Party, its connections to elements of the trade union bureaucracy and its ties to left publications such as *In These Times* and *Socialist Review*. In this article I will examine DSA's explanation for the ongoing economic crisis and consider how effective DSA's program and strategy for social change are likely to be.

Since DSA does not vote on programmatic statements nor, as an organization, adopt specific analyses or explanations of the crisis, I will rely on the work of Michael Harrington to outline DSA's approach to the questions posed by the economic crisis. Since Harrington was one of the founders of both DSA and DSOC, and he described himself in 1979 as "...spokesperson, theorist, chief cook and bottle-washer" it is legitimate to assume that his analysis and politics are the foundation for DSA's understanding of, and alternative to, capitalism.

Harrington's treatment of economic crises has two distinct aspects, corresponding to the state of the economy and the time he was writing: "business cycles" in the 60s and early 70s and "structural crisis" in the late 70s and 80s.

Throughout the period of the apparent stability of late capitalism, a period which had clearly ended by the late 70s, Harrington focused on the crisis of the welfare state, which he defined as the national political structure produced by the often contradictory effects of mass pressure and corporate manipulation. He argued that the structures of economic decision-making in US capitalism and the consequent growing identification of public policy with corporate interests had resulted in the social crisis of the 60s and 70s. His consideration of the economic factors contributing to this crisis was limited to a few comments about how the "underlying contradictions of capital" continued to express themselves through business cycles and, increasingly, inflation.

Harrington concluded that the economic slumps caused by overproduction (expansion of capital leading to a situation where the production of goods exceeds the effective demand for them resulting in layoffs, plant closings, etc. to bring supply in line with demand) and wage-squeeze (where low rates of unemployment at the peak of a boom allow wages to rise so that they cut into profit rates) could be corrected by the government's use of Keynesian policies.<sup>1</sup> Thus, he believed that there was no reason to be concerned about the possibility of a major crisis.<sup>2</sup> By the late 70s, however, Harrington had recognized that what was happening in the international and US economies was something more fundamental than a business cycle and he began to address the problem of the 'structural crisis'.

The phrase 'structural crisis' means something very different in Harrington's writings than it did in Marx's. The difference is important because it bears directly on Harrington's and DSA's political strategies.

For most Marxists structural crises are tied to the functioning of the "laws of motion" of capitalism. A structural crisis is a crisis produced by the workings of the drive to accumulate, the increasing organic composition of capital, the tendency for the rate of profit to

fall, the need to expand to remain competitive, etc. These forces which underlie the functioning of the system have their own logic and, in the long-run, are not subject to conscious attempts to manipulate or control them. For Harrington, on the other hand, the key to the crisis is to be found at the level of conscious economic policy and not at the level of economic laws of motion.

His article "A Path for America" (*Dissent*, Fall 1982) argues that the "collapse of 25 years of historical trends" (economic growth, relative prosperity) points to "a crisis of the very structure of the welfare state" stemming from the fact that in the "second stage of the welfare state... basic economic decisions were still made in the corporate boardrooms" and "... the private sector remained in charge of the allocation of most resources—an arrangement the state was supposed to facilitate, not challenge."<sup>3</sup>

The crisis, in Harrington's view, results from the increasing integration of state policy-making bodies and corporate boardrooms. It is basically a crisis of the *administration* of capitalism brought on by the state's subservience to the needs of private profit-making and demonstrated by the state's inability to deal with (and indeed the state's contribution to) increased corporate concentration and conglomeration, high rates of debt, sectoral crises in housing, health, agriculture and energy, and mass unemployment attendant on a new technological revolution.<sup>4</sup> Harrington here extended his earlier analysis of the structural crisis of the welfare state (as the cause of the social crisis of the 60s and 70s) to explain the reappearance of severe economic crisis in the 70s and 80s.

With such a theory of crises the relationship of progressive to corporate forces within the state, especially those parts of the state in which economic policy is made, becomes a central question. State policies can either contribute to the crisis, as Harrington asserts has been the case up to the present, or they can resolve it. But what is the nature of such policies? Harrington proposes that it is necessary to "begin to transform the basic structures..."<sup>5</sup> and develop "proposals that move in a socialist direction by democratizing the decision-making powers now held by corporations."<sup>6</sup> Presumably this will result in economic policies based on social needs rather than private profit.

This sounds like a strategy that will present a very basic challenge to capitalism, but that is not Harrington's intention for he immediately states the limits to the process. He calls for "... a structural reform of late capitalism, not society's basic transformation"<sup>7</sup> and argues that "as in the 1890s and 1930s there will have to be a fundamental restructuring of the system—

within the system."<sup>8</sup> Between transforming the basic structures and rejecting society's basic transformation Harrington seems to end up with little more than reforms that will make capitalists pay some of the social costs of their private decisions. I will return to the limits that Harrington accepts/imposes, but first I will examine how Harrington sees the necessary restructuring coming about.

Harrington's view is that restructuring will occur through a massive change in the government's role in the economy. Instead of acting as facilitator for the profit-making of corporations, the state will ensure that economic activity satisfies social needs. For example, full employment will be guaranteed by "... planned, federal creation of entire new industries,"<sup>9</sup> inflation will be controlled by federal control of credit allocation and national health insurance;<sup>10</sup> an overhaul of the tax system will shift the burden of paying for this restructuring onto the corporations.<sup>11</sup> In short, "... the crisis of the welfare state is going to be resolved by national economic planning."<sup>12</sup> Harrington's reliance on state intervention to carry out the necessary restructuring is founded upon a very specific, and explicit, notion of the nature of the state in capitalist society.

In an interview in *Socialist Review* in 1979<sup>13</sup> Harrington stated that, in his view, the state is "relatively autonomous," an arena of class struggle where progressive forces can gain influence, and then control. Control over parts of the state can be used to strengthen progressive influence in other areas, eventually permitting the implementation of a left program. This view of the state is the theoretical basis for DSA's orientation to the Democratic Party as well as their electoralist and legislative orientation in work outside of the DP.<sup>14</sup>

The strategy that flows from this view of the state is one which increasingly relies on electing 'better' people, passing 'better' laws and gaining control of the apparatus established to administer the laws. From being an arena of the class struggle the state becomes *the* arena.

We can see now that there is a common thread linking the various elements of Harrington's response to the crisis. This thread is the importance of control of the state as the tool for social change in a capitalist society. But there are a number of serious problems with Harrington's theory of the state and the strategy that is derived from it. These problems all have to do with the limits of state action under capitalism, limits that are much clearer if it is recognized that crises are inherent in capitalism and are not the result of mistaken or anti-social policies.

The current crisis is not, as Harrington would have it, a "crisis of the very structure of the welfare state," but a crisis of the very structure of the economy—a crisis of profitability—brought on by the logic of competition. In order to maintain their profits and their competitive position, capitalists take steps that are necessary for their individual survival in the short-run but that, at the same time, undercut their own, and capitalism's, economic stability in the long-run. Thus, for example, the introduction of new technology and machinery designed to raise productivity also has a *tendency* to reduce profit rates by reducing the ratio of labor (the source of surplus value and, therefore, profits) to capital. And once one capitalist or firm has taken this step its competitors are forced to follow suit to maintain their

position, thus exacerbating the tendency toward declining profit rates. When profit rates fall, as has been the case in the US for some time, productive facilities are milked so that capital can move to greener pastures; plants close and jobs are lost.

When this happens the main question to be answered by governments under capitalism, even those governments controlled by the left, is how to restore the conditions of profitability so that investment in industry will increase, goods and jobs will be produced and the economy returned to good health. Under such circumstances, no matter how benevolent its intentions, a government that is not prepared to go beyond the logic of capitalism will be forced to implement austerity policies. In other words, if a government is not carrying out anti-capitalist policies (which Harrington argues are not on the agenda) it will carry out pro-capitalist policies. The truth of this can be seen in the experience of the Mitterand government in France.

In France, where the state has a much greater direct role in the economy than it has in the US, a social-democratic government committed to expansionary policies was elected in the spring of 1981. This government acted in accordance with its declared principles and, in the first few months of its tenure, raised the minimum wage, created new jobs in the public sector, moved to reduce the workweek and pledged itself to Keynesian-style deficit spending to pull the French economy out of the recession. However, these policies exacerbated the crisis of profitability facing French capital and led to increasing disinvestment and capital flight. Faced with this situation the "socialist" government acted in accordance with its underlying principles—the transformation of the system must not challenge the system itself—and began to implement a series of austerity measures.

The franc was devalued, wage increases held to less than the rate of inflation, investment incentives for capitalists expanded and the workforce in the state sector reduced by tens of thousands, with the lay-offs particularly severe in state-run industries such as steel, auto and shipbuilding. The logic of capitalism and its consequent requirement that the conditions for profitable investment be safeguarded has created a situation where Mitterand's policies, and those of the other social-democratic governments of Western Europe, bear a striking resemblance to those of Margaret Thatcher.<sup>15</sup>

## Harrington vs Harrington

Surprisingly, Harrington almost recognizes that this must occur. In 1976, in his book *Twilight of Capitalism*, he wrote "so long as private corporations remain the dominant production institution of society, *no matter who is in power*, the long run trend in society will be to promote the corporate interest"<sup>16</sup> (my emphasis). Why? Because the state's "funds, its power, its political survival depend on private-sector performance. So do the jobs of most workers. The state's interest in perpetuating its own rule is thus, in economic fact, identified with the health of the capitalist economy."<sup>17</sup> Unfortunately, Harrington is just tipping his hat in Marx's direction with these caveats. Taking them to heart would result in a very different position from Harrington's own. Harrington proposes the state initiate structural reforms while "private corporations would remain the dominant



production institution." How, then, to counter the state's long-run tendency to promote the corporate interest? How do we get from the situation where the laws of motion of capitalism hold to a situation where they do not? DSA's strategy and program provide no ideas for bridging this gap.

### The Relative Autonomy of the State

For Harrington and DSA the key to an understanding of the state is its "autonomy," but an understanding of the limits of this autonomy is also necessary. What are the boundaries within which the state will be constrained in its actions by the functioning of the capitalist mode of production itself? To what extent can the capitalist state be used against capitalism? How do we "free" a left government from dependence on the economic performance of the private sector?

These questions continue to be hotly debated on the left and a discussion of the different positions is considerably beyond the scope of this article, but in my opinion the answers have been given time after time. The capitalist class recognizes that its political power flows from its economic power and it has shown repeatedly, with Chile in 1973 being but one of the bloodier of recent examples, that it will not sit idly by while that economic power is whittled away. Investment strikes, lock-outs, plant closings and other forms of economic and political sabotage, as well as military actions, will be the capitalist's response to a government that attempts "structural" reforms.<sup>16</sup> Recognizing the limits of the state's autonomy and the need to counter the inevitable capitalist response a left strategy must be prepared to challenge the logic of capitalism, not just the power of large corporations.

### An Alternative to Reformist Restructuring

If, as I have argued here, the economic crisis and its attendant destruction of lives and livelihoods are the fruits of the structure of production under capitalism and not merely the results of policy decisions, then any serious struggle against the effects of the crisis must begin by rejecting the logic of the system that produced the crisis to begin with. And it must be recognized that the power to challenge that logic effectively does not lie within the state because political power does not rest with the state but with that class that controls the society's factories, banks and offices—its means of production. Therefore, as unfashionable and untimely as it may sound, it is mass struggle around economic, political and social demands, regardless of their effect on profit rates, that provides the key to bridging the gap between DSA's oft-expressed socialist goals and the economic and political realities of capitalist society. Indeed, it is one of the ironies of a period of economic crisis that a successful struggle for reforms requires a revolutionary strategy, a strategy that recognizes the need to smash through the limits imposed by the need to preserve conditions for profitable capitalist investment. Thus, while it remains necessary to fight for and win reforms, such a fight must be seen as part of a strategy and struggle to replace capitalism and the capitalist state, not merely reorganize it.

Chile from 1970–1973 and Portugal in 1974–1975

indicate the potential for sweeping social change when an aggressive workers' movement is able to take advantage of the existence of a left-wing government to press for basic economic and political reforms. But, in neither case did the governments in power wholeheartedly back, let alone lead, the workers' movement. It was the independent mobilizations of the working class, particularly in response to sabotage by capitalists, that pushed the governments to the left and opened up a revolutionary dynamic.

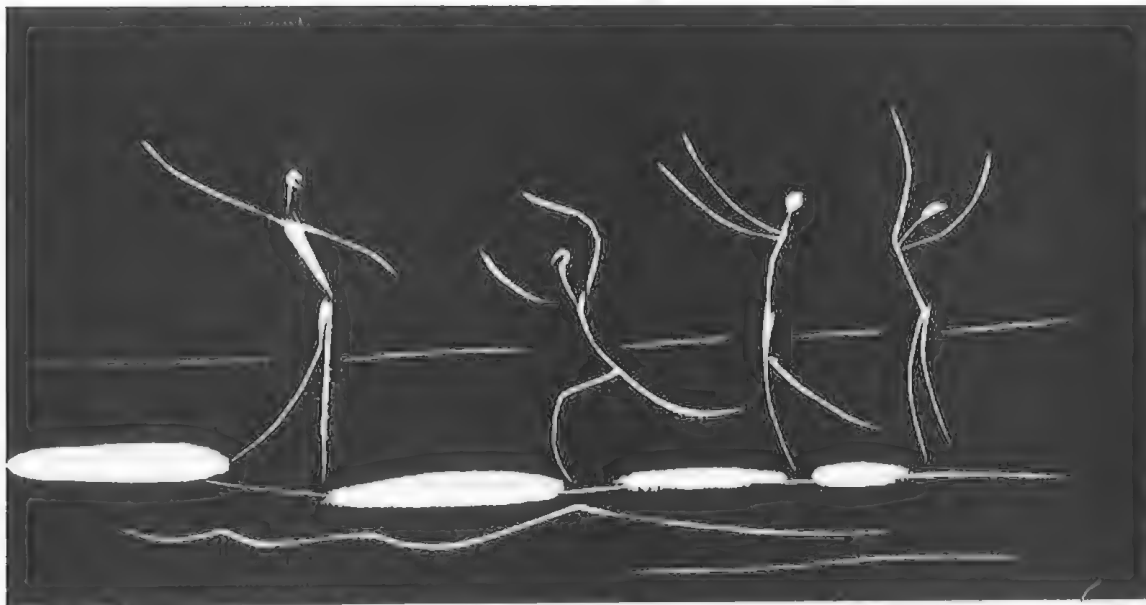
However, despite the character of the governments, the states in both Chile and Portugal remained capitalist states and the capitalist class was able to use its positions in the state apparatus, its control of industry and its ties to international capital to throw the workers' movement back.

From the defeats of the Chilean and Portuguese revolutions, many have concluded that a left-wing government must not scare the capitalists, ought not go too far, too fast. That conclusion is not justified. Rather, it is necessary to encourage mass revolutionary activity at the base of the economy in order to limit and then overthrow capitalist power at the point of production and within the state apparatus. It is this that opens up the possibility of a state instituting changes that are truly "structural."

### NOTES

Special thanks to Susan Cahn, Steve Zeluck and the participants in the seminar on Crisis Theories and Political Programs at the New School for Social Research, Winter 1983

1. Harrington, *Socialism*, 1970 pp. 349 & 355
2. *ibid.* p. 351
3. Harrington, "A Path for America" *Dissent* Fall 1982 p. 406
4. *ibid.* pp. 407–410
5. *ibid.* p. 417
6. *ibid.* p. 407
7. *ibid.* p. 417
8. *ibid.* p. 407
9. *ibid.* p. 417
10. *ibid.* pp. 419, 420
11. *ibid.* p. 421
12. *ibid.* p. 424
13. *Socialist Review* # 1979
14. see comments on DSA's role in Mass. Tenants Organization, ATC Winter '84. Also Harrington's address to DSA National Committee Spring '82. This view that the state can be won and then used for anti-corporate policies is not peculiar to DSA. Rather it is a fundamental feature of social-democratic politics. A clear example of this at present is the IAM's Rebuilding America which is focussed almost entirely on legislative action to attain greater state intervention.
15. See ATC Fall 1983 for further discussion
16. Harrington, *Twilight of Capitalism*, 1976 p. 313
17. *ibid.* p. 307
18. There are those, such as Harrington, who argue that the New Deal represents an example of the state being used to carry out structural reforms of capitalism, but this misreads the New Deal. The New Deal did not pose any basic challenge to capitalism. It restructured the state apparatus, in part in response to mass pressure and the fear of mass radicalization, and in part, probably the largest part, as a reflection of the restructuring taking place in the economy and accomplished at the price of a decade and a half of depression and war. The point is not that a capitalist state cannot institute reforms, especially during times of prosperity, but that it cannot institute reforms that pose a challenge to capitalism or that impose too great a burden on profitability. The gutting of OSHA, EPA and the Supreme Court's validating the use of bankruptcy law as a tool to break unions demonstrate what becomes of reforms that get in the way of restoring conditions for profitable investment.



# The New Middle Class and Socialist Politics

Bob Carter\*

**T**he contributions in *Against the Current* (Winter, 1984) to the debate on the new middle class are to be welcomed as a sign of the serious attention which changes in the class structure of capitalist societies are receiving not only from Marxist academics but also from organizations committed to more practical activities. The relative decline in the number of manual workers and the continued growth of occupations which have as part of their content either direct control over the labor of others (professions, line management, supervision) or more indirect influence through their apparent monopolization of key organizational skills or specialized knowledge (administrators, engineers, technicians, planners) pose for socialists urgent problems of analysis and strategy. The articles by Charles Post and Peter Meiksins represent strongly opposed ways of understanding the class character of the employees in these occupations. Post argues that they form "a new middle class" situated between labor and capital; Meiksins argues that they are part of a differentiated and stratified working class. Post stresses the roles these occupations play in maintaining the political and ideological domination of capital over labor. Meiksins, on the other hand, stresses these workers' increasing incorporation into the labor process and their position as wage laborers. Thus, Post argues that the development of a broad socialist movement depends on formal alliances which unite the new middle class and the working class. In contrast, Meiksins sees all white collar labor as simply working class and thereby emphasizes the "material basis" for this growing section to adopt socialist political stances.

Post's and Meiksins' characterizations are in fact accurate but partial descriptions of these employees' relations with both capital and labor. Their analyses remain partial because each deals with only one side of the contradictory relationships which comprise the social position of these occupations. I want to argue that Post's and Meiksins' insights need to be integrated and that a political strategy radically different from both of theirs is necessary to build a socialist movement.

Post's and Meiksins' contributions represent the two major tendencies in socialist approaches to changes in the capitalist class structure. Meiksins falls within the more traditional response frequently triggered by bour-

geois claims about the erosion of the working class by the growth of white collar labor. This response reiterates Marx's assertion in the *Communist Manifesto* that the class structure of capitalist societies is destined to be simplified into two antagonistic classes based on capital and wage labor and defines the working class as coterminous with wage labor. The varied content of labor performed, or whether some tasks can be considered as labor at all, is unimportant; the fact that someone has to sell his/her labor is sufficient in and of itself for inclusion within the working class.

For much of white collar labor, including salespeople, clerks and public service workers, this analysis is theoretically sound and corresponds to people's experiences and conceptions about who belongs to the working class. However, the analysis is inadequate and leads to a

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good deal of confusion in its tendency to extend the term "working class" to all categories of employees who do not fully own or control the means of production or who do not have career paths which will lead them to such control or ownership. This extension makes no theoretical sense since it fails to distinguish between the form of wage labor and the content of the work performed. Corporate management is now a collective, hierarchically organized function. That managers receive payment in the form of wages or salary only disguises the reality—for instance, the fact that line management receives payment, in part, of surplus value and not of wages. The basis for the cleavage between workers and management is thus blurred and unconvincing and does not correspond to the experience of socialist activists at the workplace.

Even those writers who acknowledge that the subjective consciousness of lower level management fails to reflect their "objective" position and interests, assume that de-skilling and periodic crises will force such employees to recognize the economic and class realities of their position. While this version has the merits of treating class and consciousness as historically determined, it nevertheless is deterministic, holding that politics and consciousness will ultimately flow from economic position. Such perspectives are similar to those produced by the left in Weimar Germany, which quite wrongly envisioned an inevitable conversion of the new middle class to socialist politics. The fate of these theories should serve as a warning against underestimating not only the influence of class struggle on political alignments but also the continued material advantages of alignment with the bourgeoisie because of the role the new middle class plays within the production process.<sup>1</sup>

But if Meiksins' analysis fails to solve certain problems, so does Post's opposing perspective. Taking the influential framework of Poulantzas, Post severely limits membership in the working class to only those categories of labor which create surplus value (i.e. only productive labor), and exercise no political or ideological domination through relations of authority or possession of specialized knowledge. This restrictive definition, which would exclude, for example, unproductive clerks and the bulk of public sector workers from the working class, necessarily undermines the idea that socialism can be created by the mass activity of the vast majority of the population and replaces it with a strategy of compromises and formal alliances negotiated by leaderships.

### Function of Capital/Function of Labor

The problems with Post's and Meiksins' perspectives have a common source in their failure to treat systematically the nature of the capitalist production process. In this respect it is telling that neither cite Carchedi's *On the Economic Identification of Social Classes*,<sup>2</sup> a work central to recent discussions on the nature of the new middle class and one which starts from an examination of the capitalist production process. Carchedi, following Marx, makes the distinction between, on the one hand, the labor process concerned with producing new goods and services (use values) which would be necessary under any system of production including socialism

and, on the other hand, tasks which are not part of the labor process but which arise under capitalism specifically because of capital's need to generate profits. Functions of control performed by managers, for example, are outside the labor process but are necessary to capitalist production because of the antagonisms inherent in the social relations of capitalism: put simply, without the compulsion of capitalist control workers would not perform at a rate of intensity high enough to guarantee profits.

This method of organizing the capitalist production process, however, does not mean a simple division of the production process into two mutually hostile social forces. This is because, as Marx argued, any system of social production necessitates work to unify and coordinate it. The work of management does not consist purely of controlling the workforce but contains also tasks which can be conceived as unifying and coordinating ones, such as ensuring the order and arrival of materials necessary for the adding of new use values—tasks which thus fall within the labor process proper. Because, with the division of labor, production is a complex social process, the tasks of coordinating it are manifold and managers are increasingly drawn into this necessary labor as part of the social unit which Marx termed the collective worker. Marx made it clear that managers, at least for some of the time, could be regarded as productive workers:

"Some work better with their hands, others with their heads, one as manager, engineer, technologist etc. the other as overseer, the third as manual labourer or even drudge. An ever increasing number of types of labour are included in the immediate concept of *productive labour* and those who perform it are classed as *productive workers*, workers directly exploited by capital and *subordinated* to its processes of production and expansion."<sup>3</sup>

But while management might perform productive work and belong to the "immediate concept of *productive labour*" it should be stressed that this is not their sole function and that they also perform the function of capital.

Out of the changes in capitalism which have given rise to both the increasingly collective nature of labor, on the one hand, and the replacement of the old style capitalist with a management structure, on the other, Carchedi is able to construct a new middle class which performs both the function of labor and the function of capital. This is not the place to do justice to the complexity of his argument (or to complain about its unnecessary abstruseness). The point is to show how it allows a resolution of some of the problems thrown up by the analyses of Post and Meiksins. Most important, once we recognize the dual functions of members of the new middle class we can get beyond understanding them as either in the working class or having no organic links with it.

In adopting the term "the new middle class" to describe the social position of sections of middle and lower management, service professionals and others, some qualifications need to be made. First, neither Carchedi nor I wish to imply a homogeneous social position. But the term is useful in distinguishing the social position of such employees from, on the one hand, corporate officials who function effectively as capitalists and, on the other, workers who perform no functions of capital. Secondly, while travelling some way with



Carchedi, it is also necessary to point out the limitations of his analysis. Not only does his structuralist approach leave out any account of the part played by subjectivity and consciousness but the approach is also susceptible to the criticism that it is impossible in reality to distinguish between the function of capital and the function of labor. In particular, it is claimed that empirically the work of unity and coordination cannot be divided from that of control and surveillance, the two being inextricably fused in practice. If such criticisms are pertinent then the foundation of the new middle class collapses.

## Shop Floor Organization

Carchedi is vulnerable to these criticisms because he shows little concern for the complexity of everyday class struggle. He gives the impression that tasks have some specific technical content which qualifies them for one or the other of the respective functions. But the social function of tasks such as work scheduling, job allocation and quality control has to be viewed within the context of the overall social relations within the workplace. The criteria for allocating jobs to the workforce, for instance, can be by strict rota, by allocation to the first free person, or at the complete discretion of the foreman. In the first two instances the rules do not allow management to use allocation as a method of control, whereas in the latter case it can be used as a method of disciplining uncooperative workers by ensuring that they get all the worst paying or unpopular jobs.

In different circumstances, therefore, what are formally the same tasks take on a different significance. Where a substantial amount of control and confidence resides in the workforce, the attempt by management to use certain tasks as methods of control can be frustrated. In a changed situation, after a serious defeat of the workforce, for example, the same tasks can have their function transformed into control mechanisms: a simple question from a foreman as to whether a piece of work has yet been completed may cease to be a purely factual enquiry necessary for coordinating production and instead take on the more authoritarian character of an implied threat.

As a general rule, those sections of the new middle class which perform a greater proportion of technical tasks (scientists, engineers etc.) and which are therefore rooted more deeply in a real labor process, will have both the material base and confidence to take trade union action against higher management and will be more likely to identify with the cause of labor. Conversely, those tasks which only arise because of the imperatives of capital accumulation, such as rate-fixing, allow few opportunities for the identification with other workers' aspirations. But even here the relationships and tendencies have to be viewed within the framework of the balance of power and confidence within the workplace. As power and confidence ebb and flow, and the social functions of certain tasks change, so it is also likely that the consciousness and activity of the new middle class will change. Where trade union organization is weak and the level of capital's control mechanisms high, the new middle class will tend to identify with capital as the only viable source of power. In so far as sections of the class opt for this direction the balance

of their social functions within the workplace changes towards a greater proportion of control. Post recognizes the effect of class struggle on the general orientation of the new middle class, but does not see that the effects of struggle are mirrored in the day to day relations of the workplace, and moreover, the decisions which sections of the new middle class take can also actively affect their own class functions and, hence, positions.

## Public Sector Workers

So far this analysis has dealt implicitly with class determination in the private sector, but it also has important applications to the public sector. As Post states, "a large proportion of state employees (sanitation workers, postal workers, workers in nationalized industries, etc.) are productive, manual and non-supervisory workers."<sup>4</sup> Quite clearly, it is not hard to conceive above them people who function as a new middle class and others who function as capitalists. But the concept of workers should not be restricted to just those elaborated by Post. There are also many unproductive state employees, such as clerks, janitors, etc. who are, as Meiksins argues, unambiguously workers. They may not produce surplus value but they are paid only the market rate for their labor power and not for the actual amount of labor they perform. What is more neither Post nor anyone else has established a structural antagonism between them and productive workers. In other words, they do not have separate class interests.

It does not follow however, that *all* unproductive state employees are workers. The position of social workers and teachers, for instance, is far more complex. According to Meiksins they are simply workers because, although mental laborers holding positions of relative authority, they are nevertheless "wage-laborers and part of the collective labor process which is exploited by capital."<sup>5</sup> This approach dismisses far too lightly the causes and consequences of their relative authority. A narrow, economic labor process analysis could claim that these groups have no functions of capital within the production process of teaching and social work,<sup>6</sup> but this is to ignore the wider designs of these professions. The fact is that teaching and social work are not neutral functions in society but have grown up as part and parcel of strategies of social control and this affects both the day to day relationships of these groups with their students and "clients" and their own consciousness.

But while Meiksins is incorrect to focus solely on the engagement of teachers and social workers in a labor process, Post is equally incorrect in his characterization of their roles: "Unionized teachers and social workers are still mental labourers involved in socializing working class youth to capitalist discipline and administering unemployed and underemployed workers." That this is part of the function of these groups is undeniable but they also transfer skills and knowledge that would again be necessary under any social system. What is more, they do so, as Meiksins points out, as subordinate members of organizations not as instigators and directors of these processes.

Moreover, the very nature of the work that teachers and social workers do, allows their own interpretations of their roles some considerable influence. Consequently the way in which they carry out their jobs var-

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ies greatly. In other words the consciousness and politics of members of these groups, although constrained by their circumstances, can and does influence the decisions they make, whether they strengthen or weaken capitalist control, and hence their own class functions. Consciousness, function and class position are not divided by Chinese walls.

### Strategy

The differing analyses of Meiksins and Post call for widely divergent political strategies. Of the two, Meiksins' strategy appears the more radical. Denying in practice the importance of the functions of capital performed by a large number of employees, Meiksins emphasizes the commonality of wage labor and advocates organizing *all* employees as part of the working class. One of two consequences can stem from such a perspective. First, if socialists working in the unions with rank and file perspectives take the analysis seriously, they will become disillusioned when they are unable to build a militant socialist current among sections of the new middle class. That there are objective constraints on organizing employees performing the functions of capital needs to be understood in order that socialists have realistic expectations of the possibilities for organizing. Second, if, as Meiksins maintains, such employees are already working class, their demands for instance, for increased differentials or greater authority over workers, can be regarded as legitimate trade union demands. If such employees are simply part of a differentiated working class, is it not to be expected that their demands are different from other sections, but equally justified? With this logic socialists can accommodate themselves to reactionary demands of the new middle class and become passive towards the functions of capital performed, instead of encouraging the transformation of the roles of the new middle class as part of the process of building a socialist movement.

In contrast to Meiksins, Post seeks not to organize supervisory, mental and non-productive employees as a working class but calls for alliances with them, acknowledging their separate interests as a new middle class. Indeed, so heavy is his emphasis on the need for a working class alliance with this new middle class that his own analysis and his critique of others appear to take this alliance as a starting point for organizing. Yet, paradoxically, his article also recognizes that even if this strategy were correct, there could only be an alliance if there was a confident and well-organized socialist labor movement—the very condition absent. To therefore stress the need for alliances rather than an urgent and systematic orientation towards the working class is profoundly mistaken. Moreover, even if the labor movement were confident and well-organized, the strategy and tactics of socialists should be to organize the new middle class not by recognizing and legitimating those aspects of its role which are hostile to the function of labor, but to respond to and strengthen those demands which reflect its role as part of the collective worker. Indeed, Post himself, whose sense of practice is stronger than his theory, implicitly recognizes this point. He concludes that it is necessary not only to organize the new middle class but also to raise its consciousness of the need to overcome divisions between it and the working class, by challenging the mental-manual division of

labor. However, were this to be achieved, what need then for alliances?

The analysis I have outlined is significantly different from those of Meiksins and Post. Unlike Meiksins' analysis, it does not collapse all but the top echelons of management into the working class. It provides a more realistic framework for analyzing the class structure because it recognizes the objective constraints to the adoption of socialist politics by sections of the new middle class. The roles and privileges of foremen, for example, are likely to be threatened by an insurgent working class demanding workers' control of production. On the other hand, unlike the analysis of Post, neither does it accept the automatic exclusion of mental and non-productive employees from the working class, nor the existence of a distinct new middle class performing *only* the function of capital. Rather it stresses the contradictory social roles of the new middle class, roles which provide the possibilities for contradictory orientations. Moreover, this already complex picture is further complicated by the influence of the consciousness and subjectivity of those middle class employees who, because of the nature of their jobs, have a large measure of discretion as to how they carry out their work and who therefore can show wide variations in politics and orientation at the workplace.

This perspective stresses the contradictory tendencies within the new middle class and underlines the active role which a socialist movement can play in encouraging the adoption by the class of socialist politics. For socialists to be successful in this role, however, the strength, independence and confidence of the working class movement are crucial. The orientations of the new middle class parallel the vacillating politics of the old petty bourgeoisie, veering in one direction or another according to which of the major classes appears to be winning. But the difference between the old and the new middle class is that the new has roots inside the capitalist labor process and is exploited alongside the working class. While not ignoring the problems and constraints arising from the functions of capital performed by the new middle class, the fact of its exploitation provides socialists with substantive issues on which they can support the demands of the new middle class against capital and, in so doing, build up organic links with sections of the class, transforming their consciousness, functions and class positions in the process ■

1. Many of the points in this article are stated more systematically in Bob Carter *Capitalism, Class Conflict and the New Middle Class*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985.

2. Guglielmo Carchedi, *On the Economic Identification of Social Classes*, London, 1977.

3. Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, Penguin Books, London, 1976, p. 1040.

4. Charles Post "A New Middle Class?", *Against the Current* (Winter, 1984), p. 41.

5. Peter Meiksins, "New Middle Class or Working Class?", *Against the Current* (Winter, 1984), p. 44.

6. Alex Callinicos holds this position, maintaining that working class hostility to social workers, for example, is not a consequence of their social role but merely equivalent to the hostility shown to bus drivers. If the analogy were correct, the provision of more social workers, just as the provision of more buses, would solve the problem which creates the tensions in the first place and hence remove the hostility towards these other "workers." "The New Middle Class' and Socialist Politics," *International Socialism*, 20, Summer, 1983, pp. 82-119.



**Review: Nelson Lichtenstein, *Labor's War at Home: The CIO in World War II* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983)**

by Charles Post \*

**I**t is a rare occasion when a piece of scholarly historical research is of compelling interest to socialist activists in the labor movement. Nelson Lichtenstein's history of the CIO during the second world war is one of these rare works, and should be required reading for all those attempting to understand and overcome the current crisis of the US labor movement.

Lichtenstein integrates two bodies of left-wing scholarship, often seen as mutually exclusive, to produce this important book. The first is the work of such political theorists as Poulantzas and Offe, with their emphasis on the centrality of political power and state institutions to the class struggle. From these theoretical explorations, Lichtenstein draws a conception of the capitalist state as the institutional framework where the bourgeoisie overcomes its fragmentation into competing capitals and formulates a relatively unified political orientation; and where the working class' unity is dissolved into isolated and individualized "citizens" and its struggle channeled into the dead-end of bureaucratic state agencies. The second tradition is the work of such social historians of the US as Lynd and Brecher, with their emphasis on the "hidden history of the workplace." From this historical research, Lichtenstein derives an understanding of the fundamental role of shop-floor struggles over wages, hours and especially the nature and pace of work in shaping working class organization, leadership and politics. Lichtenstein's successful synthesis of these two bodies of research gives us a new perspective on the complex relations between the changing cultural universe of the working class and the development of working class leadership and organization; and between point of production struggles over the nature, pace and intensity of labor and the class struggle at the level of the capitalist state.

For Lichtenstein, the second world war was a watershed in the CIO's evolution from a rank and file run, potentially anti-capitalist union movement into the highly bureaucratized and conservative organization we know today. The CIO officialdom's support of the war effort, in particular the acceptance of the no-strike pledge, resulted in the temporary integration of the industrial unions into the capitalist state apparatus and a consequent bureaucratization of the industrial unions. The CIO leadership's alliance with "progressive capital" in the Roosevelt administration "provided the economic and ideological context required to routinize

and channel union activity in such a way as to diminish the legitimacy of rank and file activity while institutionalizing leadership authority and increasing government influence in union affairs." (p. 6) The bureaucratization of the CIO and the debilitation of the shop-floor activity of the working class gravely weakened the labor movement as a whole, undermining all of the union officialdom's plans for a role in the administration of the war economy. The war-time integration of the CIO officialdom into the capitalist state and the resulting bureaucratization of the CIO paved the way for the postwar capitalist offensive, culminating in the Taft-Hartley Act, the Cold war purge of socialists and communists from the labor movement and the creation of a factory regime which fragmented working class strength at the point of production.

### **The CIO on the eve of the war**

By the end of the 1930's, the CIO leadership faced a contradiction between localized militant working class activity and the national organization of capital. In most mass production industries, the CIO unions possessed large and active memberships, strong stewards systems, and traditions of effective direct action over shop floor and local grievances. However, the CIO unions remained highly decentralized and fairly weak at the national level. Especially after the "Roosevelt Recession" of the 1937-39, there was a marked disparity between the CIO's ability to win demands at a local level and to negotiate national or industry-wide contracts.

The embryonic CIO bureaucracy experienced this uneven and combined development of working class organization as the twin problem of unstable membership and dues base and of unpredictable local militancy. Their solution was the "Union Shop": contractually guaranteed union membership for all workers employed in a given corporation. Such an arrangement would guarantee a stable membership and dues base and allow the officialdom to gain autonomy from and authority over the rank and file. "The union shop represented the company's recognition of the union's permanent status in the plant," freeing the union leadership from "fighting for each grievance until they satisfied rank and file members" and allowing them "to process only those grievances supported by the language of the contracts." (pp. 22-23) Within a grander schema derived from corporatist Catholic social doctrines,

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Workers of America (USWA) saw the "union shop" leading to the establishment of "industrial councils." With representation of both labor and management, the "industrial councils" would administer key branches of capitalist production for "the benefit of all."

The labor officialdom's plans for class cooperation evoked little interest from any sector of industrial capital during the late 1930's. From the bourgeoisie's perspective, the labor officialdom had yet to prove itself capable of actually taming the rank and file of the CIO. Despite working class demobilization after the sit-down strikes of 1936-37, continuing direct worker contestation of managerial authority on the shop-floor haunted capital in the mass production industry. The wartime experience of active collaboration between the labor bureaucracy and capital was required to overcome capital's hostility to union organization and collective bargaining.

The beginning of US war preparations in 1939-41 produced a temporary division in the ranks of the CIO leadership. Most of the labor officialdom viewed the beginning of military mobilization as an opportunity to increase labor's "influence" with the Roosevelt administration and to win the "union shop." John L. Lewis, with the temporary support of the US Communist party (CP), opposed the "defense mobilization." Lewis, practically alone among labor officials, clearly understood that another war would gravely weaken the labor movement and prepare for a right wing offensive. Despite threats to organize an independent Labor party and to resign as CIO president, Lewis found himself isolated within the CIO leadership. The "Labor-New Deal" alliance was based on the liberal wing of the Democratic party's commitment to the maintenance of the National Labor Relations Board. The vast majority of labor bureaucrats understood that only by maintaining this alliance, at whatever risk, could they realize their program for a social-democratic restructuring of the US economy.

The bloc between the labor bureaucracy and the leading representatives of capital required new institutional forms in 1940-41, as war preparation began to dramatically reduce unemployment. Attempting to take advantage of the almost complete disappearance of a reserve army of labor, the CIO launched organizing drives in the burgeoning defense industries. Determined employer resistance to unionization led to a series of strikes in 1941, straining the CIO leadership's relationship with the FDR administration. After the failure of Sidney Hillman's voluntary mediation efforts in the Allis-Chalmers strike of January to April 1941, FDR agreed to Hillman's suggestion to establish the National Defense Mobilization Board (NDMB) in March 1941. NDMB, and its successor the National War Labor Board (NWLB), were "tri-partite boards" with representation of labor, capital and the "public/state" capable of "setting...industry-wide wage patterns, fixing a system of 'industrial jurisprudence' on the shop floor, and influencing the internal structure of the new industrial unions." (p. 51) Charged with the task of maintaining uninterrupted production in the war plants, the NDMB promoted centralized and routinized negotiation and arbitration, punished local, direct worker action and reinforced the CIO bureaucracy's authority over the rank and file.

The NDMB's first test came in the summer of 1941 at the North American Aviation plant. Led by the commu-

nist Wyndam Mortimer, the United Automobile Workers (UAW) had organized young and militant aircraft workers in the southern California defense industries. After winning an NLRB election at North American Aviation in the Spring of 1941, Mortimer, with the UAW leadership's support, called a strike for June. Despite NDMB orders and the opposition of the UAW officialdom, the North American workers refused to end their walkout. Roosevelt enforced the NDMB's order with federal troops, who smashed the strike and reopened the plant. With minor protests over the use of federal troops, CIO President Murray, the UAW Executive Board and the vast majority of the CIO leadership condemned the "communist inspired" strike and pledged to respect all future NDMB decisions.

The summer of 1941 was a turning point in the wartime class struggle. First, the bourgeoisie, organized through the state, demonstrated its determination to crush any and all attempts to disrupt war production. Second, the CIO bureaucracy displayed its willingness to go to any length, including acquiescence to federal strike-breaking, to preserve their alliance with the Roosevelt administration. Thirdly, the jailing of the Trotskyist leaders of the Teamsters and the CP's shift to complete support for US entry into the war after the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union effectively eliminated all potential opposition to wartime class peace in the working class.

### **The No-Strike Pledge, "Maintenance of Membership" and "Equality of Sacrifice"**

Immediately after Pearl Harbor, the leaderships of the AFL, CIO and the Railway Brotherhoods agreed to a no-strike pledge for the duration of the war. The CIO bureaucracy realized that the no-strike pledge and a *de facto* wage freeze could unravel the ties binding workers to their unions. The labor officialdom saw "union security" through "maintenance-of-membership" agreements as the "payoff" for labor's support for the war effort. In other words, the labor bureaucracy demanded that the capitalist state recruit workers into unions by mandating union membership for all those who worked in plants where a union had won an NLRB election. The "maintenance of membership" arrangement would promote the bureaucracy's autonomy from the rank and file of the CIO and allow the officialdom to advance along the road of a labor-capital partnership mediated by a "neutral" state.

The representatives of capital on the NDMB had refused to grant "union security" during two United Mine Workers (UMW) strikes in the "captive mines" in the fall of 1941 sparking the resignation of the CIO representatives and the collapse of the NDMB in November 1941. In early 1942, CIO leaders temporarily shelved demands for union security and focused on obtaining wage increases commensurate with the rapidly rising cost of living. The Office of Production Management (OPM) refused to consider these demands. Wage increases were held down to approximately 15% for the duration of the war under the OPM guidelines formulated in early 1942, which became known as the "Little Steel" formula (the formula was first used in the

smaller, specialty steel plants, the so-called "Little Steel" companies). Frustrated in their attempts to win wage concessions in return for curtailing strike activity, and faced with a massive recomposition of the working class (the influx of women, Black and southern white workers with little union experience), the CIO leadership again pressed for capitalist state guarantees of union membership.

In June 1942, Lewis' threat to organize strike actions against the "Little Steel" formula finally forced the newly formed NLRB to agree to "Maintenance of Membership" arrangements for all unions that agreed to the no-strike pledge. The maintenance of membership agreement helped create an inactive and passive membership with no experience of self-organization and activity and "with membership growth virtually assured...union leaders felt less keenly the pressures generated within their own organizations, the grievances and complaints that inevitably arose out of the rapidly changing wartime work environment." (p. 81)

In 1942-43, the massive expansion of the war economy sharpened the long-standing division between large, technically advanced and smaller, technically backward sectors of the capitalist class. The development of factional warfare within capital was manifested within the burgeoning capitalist state agencies that administered the development of war production. The numerous disputes within and between the War Production Board and NLRB, gave the FDR administration, already fairly independent of any particular fraction of capital, an even greater autonomy. Hoping to take advantage of these schisms among the representatives of capital, the CIO leaders renewed their proposals for a social-democratization of the US economy.

The labor officialdom's first attempt to concretize their vision of a "labor-civilian" controlled war economy was Walter Reuther's plan for tripartite "Industrial Councils" in the aircraft industry during the pre-war period of "defense mobilization." These "Councils" would drastically increase the production of war planes by disregarding all of the obstacles to production posed by private property in the means of production. While the CIO officialdom found support among New Deal liberal representatives of the new and old middle classes for Reuther's proposal, determined opposition from the military and large capital led to its demise in late 1941.

The defeat of the "Reuther plan" allowed the representatives of large capital in the capitalist state war economy agencies to eliminate or isolate the representatives of small capital, the middle classes and labor. During 1942, the resurgent "military-industrial" bloc eliminated "premium pay" (weekend and holiday pay boosts which helped spread available work) and demanded "incentive pay" (collective piecework) agreements. Abandoning their demand for a complete reorganization of all state agencies involved in the war effort, the CIO bureaucracy quickly agreed to include these concessions in new contracts. However, they sought something in return to diffuse developing rank and file discontent with the "Little Steel formula," NLRB grievance procedures and the no-strike pledge. Walter Reuther's "equality of sacrifice" plan of mid-1942 called for capitalist state limitations on profits, corporate salaries, rationing and price controls, cost of living adjustments, and the like. Again, the representatives of

capital on the WPB and in the FDR administration again refused to grant any substantive concessions in exchange for the labor officials' sacrifice of shop floor militancy.

The failure of the "equality of sacrifice" plan and the CIO leaderships continual concessions to capital opened the way to AFL raids on CIO strongholds. The refusal of the International Association of Machinists and other "pure and simple trade unionists" to give up premium pay or accept incentive pay made them increasingly attractive to workers dissatisfied with the CIO leadership's brand of "social unionism." Unable to mobilize their own ranks against the AFL, the CIO leaders turned to the leading personnel of the capitalist state for help. FDR's Executive Order 9240 of January 1943, banning all premium pay, temporarily ended the problem of AFL raiding.

## Wildcats and Rank and File Political Opposition

The second world war brought unprecedented levels of employment and wages to workers in US industry. However, these conditions did not end working class concern with the inflationary deterioration of living standards, and, more importantly, with capitalist management's intensification and reorganization of the labor process in the absence of strike activity. By the middle of 1942, tens of thousands of grievances concerning transfers, discipline and other workers' control issues, most of which had been handled through direct shop floor action before the war, were piling up in the bureaucratic NLRB apparatus.

The continual shortage of labor and the growing alienation of foremen and other low level supervisors from capital (low wages, etc. had led to the formation of foremen's unions in auto and other industries) opened the way for the translation of discontent over shop floor conditions into a growing wave of unauthorized, "wildcat" strikes beginning in the summer of 1942. The wildcats of 1942-43 were short-lived and semi-spontaneous, coming in response to specific capitalist attempts to reassert control over the labor process:

They typically began when management retimed an operation or changed a job assignment and then insisted that the employees meet the new standard or perform the task. If they refused or proved sluggish, managers took disciplinary action by either firing or suspending those who failed to meet their new duties. At this point, the strike issue became less the original grievance than the discipline itself, and an entire department might go out in defense of those penalized. (p. 121)

However, not all of the wildcats were aimed against capital and its shop floor representatives. The so-called "hate strikes" in auto marked a reversion to primitive and individualized forms of working class action, as white workers sought to exclude black workers from jobs in certain plants and departments. The intervention of stewards and local officers of the UAW, many of whom would go on to lead the movement against the no-strike pledge, ended this wave of intra-class warfare in the fall of 1942.

In early 1943, the spontaneous and pre-political opposition to the no-strike pledge, capitalist encroachments on shop floor rights, the NLRB's inability to quickly and satisfactorily resolve grievances and the growing centralization and bureaucratization of the CIO began

to take an organized and political direction. While stewards, committee men and local officers in contemporary AFL-CIO unions are integrated into the International bureaucracies, the "union cadre" of the early 1940's was linked to the rank and file and were often political radicals. This "worker vanguard" gave political and organizational direction to the wildcats, replacing the "quicky" strikes with more coordinated and organized action in the spring of 1943. The "union cadre," especially in the older UAW locals, became the backbone of the political opposition to the no-strike pledge and the CIO leadership in 1944 and 1945.

The question of incentive pay (collective piecework) catalyzed the conflict between the CIO bureaucracy, and the "union cadre" and rank and file in the course of 1943. General Motors and the WPB first proposed incentive pay in early 1943. Despite their long-standing opposition to all forms of piecework, the leaders of the UAW and other CIO officials seized upon incentive pay as a means of circumventing the "Little Steel" formula and winning substantial wage increases. The CIO leadership's enthusiasm for incentive pay grew after Roosevelt reaffirmed the "Little Steel" formula in his April 1943 "hold the line" wage order. The CP's adoption of incentive pay as a central element of their wartime "program for victory" succeeded in placing this collective piecework schema at the center of political struggle in the CIO.

The UAW union cadre rapidly coalesced the opposition to incentive pay. Under leadership of Briggs Local 212 President Emil Mazey and the Trotskyists of the Workers Party and Socialist Workers Party, the opponents of incentive pay adopted a platform calling for the end of the no-strike pledge, the withdrawal of CIO representatives from the NWLB, and a break with the Democratic party and the formation of an independent labor party. Walter Reuther, isolated in the UAW bureaucracy after the failure of his "equality of sacrifice" schema, tried to capture this rank and file movement to advance his faction's position in the UAW. In April 1943, Reuther denounced incentive pay as a disguised form of piecework, but refused to call for the end of the no-strike pledge, a break with FDR, or support for the auto wildcats or UMW strike. The rank and file insurgents won their first victory, against both the mainstream CIO leaders, the CP and the Reutherites, at the Michigan CIO convention of June 1943. A large majority of delegates at the convention approved resolutions condemning incentive pay and the no-strike pledge, and calling for a labor party.

The development of a political opposition in auto to the labor officialdom's abdication of the class struggle for an alliance with the Democratic administration coincided with the UMW strikes of May through October 1943, which effectively broke the no-strike pledge and the "Little Steel" formula. Lewis had seen all his predictions about the war come true by the middle of 1943. Not only had labor surrendered the right to strike and received no returns, either in wages and hours or a voice in the running of war industry, but working conditions and wages had deteriorated. By calling out the miners in a series of strikes in the spring, and by authorizing a wildcat that eventually included 500,000 miners in the fall, Lewis won tremendous prestige among, and gave tremendous encouragement to, the "Big Four" (US Rub-

ber, Goodyear, Goodrich, General Tire) Akron locals of the United Rubber Workers (URW), the Mazeyites in the UAW (Reuther opposed the miners strikes) and other opponents of the no-strike pledge in the CIO.

The CIO leadership continued to call on workers to rely upon the NWLB and other capitalist state agencies to resolve disputes over wages, hours and shop floor conditions. As a result, the officialdom was isolated from a restive rank and file, and were increasingly dependent upon Roosevelt and the agencies of the capitalist state. The CIO bureaucracy's isolation from their membership was manifested in the unsuccessful attempt to mobilize the ranks of CIO for FDR's reelection in 1944. The abysmally low working class voter turnout, and the resulting shift to the right in the Congressional elections, did little to endear the labor officialdom to the Roosevelt administration and other representatives of the bourgeoisie. The labor bureaucracy did not appear to command the political loyalty of the working class, further reducing their value as an element of the "New Deal" coalition.

### Defeat of the Rank and File

In the aftermath of the miners' victory and the successful invasion of Europe, workers in defense industries stepped up strike actions. In response, the NWLB imposed a highly bureaucratized four-step grievance procedure, capped with an "umpire" (compulsory arbitrator), on all industrial disputes:

...the grievance procedure worked to defuse union power and legitimate managerial authority. The system shifted disputes from the shop floor, where the stewards and work groups held the greatest leverage, to the realm of contractual interpretation, where the authority of management and the value of orderly procedure weighed more heavily. In the meantime—possibly several weeks—the discipline and authority of management remained intact. As long as production continued on management's terms, workers with grievances were, in effect, guilty until proven innocent. (pp. 179-190)

Local union officers were held responsible for enforcing the grievance procedure. Any failure to utilize these mechanisms, or to allow strike activity during grievance procedures would result in the loss of maintenance of membership agreements. The NWLB's new disciplinary powers "enabled top union officials to discipline rank-and-file dissidents and reshape their organizations in a more conservative and bureaucratic mold." (p. 180)

The battle over the future evolution of the CIO took diverse forms and had very different outcomes in various unions. In the USWA, Murray was easily able to isolate dissidents in his hyper-bureaucratized international with its unified staff appointed by central office and minimal local autonomy. By contrast, the URW, like most other CIO unions, had a long tradition of local autonomy and factional division within its leadership. In the URW, the militant leaders of the "Big Four" Akron locals carried on a long term struggle with the Dalrymple-CP leadership. While never reaching the political level of the struggle in the UAW, the battle in the URW produced the May 1943 city-wide general strike in Akron against a united front of the state, the rubber companies and the international leadership of the URW.

The struggle over war time policies took its most developed political form in the UAW. In February 1944, the UAW Executive Board met in Los Angeles and adopted a policy requiring local officers to actively assist



the NWLB and the International leadership in ending local wildcats. The "Los Angeles Directive" was first used against militants in the Ford River Rouge plant in March 1944. When the CP influenced Local 600 leadership cooperated in smashing a wildcat against an arbitrary dismissal of two long-time militants, local opponents of the no-strike pledge organized the first Rank and File caucus. After Reuther and his supporters helped break a September 1943 wildcat at Chevrolet, Mazey, the Trotskyists and leaders of other left-wing UAW locals joined the River Rouge militants to form a national Rank and File caucus on a program of scrapping the no-strike pledge, withdrawing CIO representatives from the NWLB and a political break with the Roosevelt administration and the Democratic party.

The confrontation between the Rank and File caucus and the UAW leadership came to a head at the UAW convention in September 1944. Three groupings put forward proposals on the no-strike pledge at the convention. The Thomas-Addes group, backed by the CP, steadfastly defended the no-strike pledge. The Rank and File caucus, commanding some 37% of the delegate votes (derived equally from both the older, established and the newer "war baby" Locals), demanded the immediate end of the no-strike pledge and of CIO participation in the NWLB and the launching of a Labor party. The Reutherites formed the third current, seeking to channel rank and file discontent behind the career of Walter Reuther. While supporting the continuation of the no-strike pledge, the Reutherites proposed, and the convention accepted, a UAW membership referendum on the pledge.

Tremendous activity on the part of supporters and opponents of the pledge, but little rank and file excitement marked the campaign around the referendum. Only one-third of the UAW membership voted, and two-thirds of these voted to continue no-strike pledge. What explains the apparent contradiction between the indifference toward the referendum and the growing wave of wild-cats in 1944 and 1945? Lichtenstein points to the contradiction in working class consciousness between consciously held cultural values, such as patriotism, and the reality of capitalist work, which often leads to the jettisoning of these values in concrete actions. In other words, the vast majority of wild-cat strikers saw their activity as a direct response to some specific shop floor condition, not as a conscious act of political opposition to the war, the no-strike pledge, the NWLB or the Roosevelt administration. Thus, when confronted with the somewhat more abstract question of support for the pledge, many workers who rejected the pledge in practice, voted for its continuation.

## The Post-War Legacy

The bureaucracy's triumph over the ranks of the CIO was clearly evident during the immediate post-war strike wave. While beginning with local, unauthorized job actions in the fall of 1945, this rank and file activity was rapidly channeled into forms compatible with both bureaucratic hegemony within the CIO and with capitalist command of the labor process. During the tumultuous strikes of the early and mid 1930's, elected strike committees and stewards councils decided tactics and controlled negotiators in struggles that often centered around questions of the nature and pace of the labor

process. During the post-war strike wave, admittedly the quantitatively most massive in US history, the top labor officials quashed all local autonomy, dictated tactics and negotiated contracts that dealt *solely* with questions of wages and hours, all with the merest pretense of involving the rank and file. The results of the post-war struggles were a truly "pyrrhic victory." Spiraling inflation quickly wiped out the wage increases won in 1946, capital began to consolidate its reconquered control of the shop floor and the ranks of the labor movement were deprived of opportunities for self-organization and self-activity.

The bureaucracy's victory bore bitter fruit for the working class and the labor officialdom in the post-war period. Capital repaid the bureaucracy for its suppression of working class militancy during and immediately after the war with a blanket rejection of the CIO leadership's proposals for labor representation in capitalist state agencies administering "peacetime reconversion." Unable to win the right to actively collaborate with capital through the state apparatus, the labor officialdom was equally incapable of defending the working class against the capitalist offensive of 1946-48. The leadership of the CIO, despite its militant protestations, was unable to mount any resistance to the passage and implementation of the Taft-Hartley Act. Faced with capital's attempt to roll-back many of the gains won in the 1930's, the labor bureaucracy again sought relief from the Democratic party and the Truman administration. The price paid in the late 1940's for the continuation of labor's historic bloc with the Democratic party were the splitting of the CIO, the purge of socialist and communist militants, and scuttling of "Operation Dixie" to organize southern industry. In other words, the CIO bureaucracy's continued reliance upon the Democratic party and the capitalist state resulted in the fragmentation of the unity of the industrial unions, the divorce of socialist politics from the labor movement and the deepening of racial divisions within the working class.

Lichtenstein's book sheds new light on the origins of the current crisis of the US labor movement. By hastening, "in hot house fashion," the bureaucratization of the industrial unions, the wartime integration of the labor officialdom into the capitalist state apparatus laid the foundation for the postwar purges and the contemporary defeats of the US working class. Tightly centralized Internationals engaged in national collective bargaining over wages and hours left little room, and had little patience for worker initiatives "from below." On the one hand, much of the struggle over the nature and pace of work was removed from the shop-floor to the bureaucratic maze of grievance procedures. On the other hand, bureaucratic domination and the divorce of political radicalism from the working class prevented the creation of a new layer of worker leaders out of contacts between shop-floor militants in different plants or industries. Thus, the bureaucratization of the CIO deprived the US working class of traditions of self-organization, left it deeply divided along racial and gender lines and deprived it of a cadre of potential alternative, political leaders. In sum, the wartime transformation of the CIO produced a labor movement incapable of responding either to the mass social movements of the 1960's or to the capitalist offensive of the 1970's and 1980's■

# THE MALAISE OF THE LEFT AND THE ODD RELATION OF VICTOR SERGE

by Jeff Goldthorpe\*

*Midnight in the Century* by Victor Serge. Translation and foreword by Richard Greeman. London: Writers and Readers Publishing, 1982. US distributors: WW Norton, 500 Fifth Ave., New York, New York 10110.

**M***idnight in the Century*, the most recent of Victor Serge's novels to be translated into English, is not well known. One is even hard pressed to find it in left bookstores (should be in paperback). Perhaps few are interested in the fallen fortunes of five Trotskyists exiled to the Russian hinterland in 1934. It could appear to some to be yet another novel like Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag*, handy as a literary thunderbolt to be cast at the Evil Empire. The exigencies of Cold War politics seem to have trapped Serge's novels in obscurity.

Serge was born in 1890 to a family of Russian revolutionary émigrés. He grew up in Europe feeling he was "living in a world without possible escape in which there was nothing... but to fight for an impossible escape."<sup>1</sup> He was involved in anarchist circles in the complacent France of the pre-World War I era. Some of these launched a short-lived guerilla war in 1911. Serge refused to testify against his comrades and his silence earned him five years in prison. Released during the war, he made his way to Barcelona, taking part in a doomed syndicalist-led uprising, and then returned to a Russia in the throes of war communism, working for the Comintern as editor, administrator and agent abroad. With Stalin's rise to power in the late twenties, he was fired, harassed and then deported to Central Asia. In his forced inactivity he turned to history and fiction. Because of his literary reputation in France he was spared death; instead he was expelled from the USSR. But as a supporter of the anti-Stalinist POUM in the Spanish Civil War and a critic of the Moscow trials, he found little comfort in the France of the Popular Front. Barely escaping the Nazi takeover, he fled to Mexico in 1940, spending the last seven years of his life in poverty and isolation, writing some of his best works for the "desk drawer."

The major characters in *Midnight* seem trapped in obscurity as well, being partisans of socialism and democracy inside 1934 Russia. They are exiled to Chernoe, a provincial village on the northern plains. Is this simply a literary rejection of Stalinism? In part, but that is not my object here. *Midnight in the Century* speaks across a gulf of fifty years to a certain malaise existent in the US left today. This malaise hums quietly on, despite the usual silence about it in public forums of the left. Who wants to demoralize the troops?

At the opening of the novel's main section, the five exiles rejoice the coming of spring, then proceed to debate items on the "agenda": a hunger strike by imprisoned comrades and Trotsky's call for a united front in Germany. Their impotence is most striking in their impassioned polemics heard only by the trees,

where they always arrive back where they started: when will the workers arise and join the feeble resistance of the opposition? Despite their habit of rational discourse they seem like heretics: both true to the faith and pitifully deluded. Cut off from any political activity and estranged from the reticent, half-starved peasants of Chernoe, their hope in the future appears religious. This theme of heresy is deepened by digressions on the founding of Chernoe centuries earlier by a fundamentalist outcast from the Orthodox church.

There are parallels between Serge's generation of revolutionaries and the "generation of '68." Both generations rode on a great upsurge. Both later split, with one section joining the power structure, and the other section holding on to the old ideals, becoming a "lost generation" bypassed by history. "We were the largest, most liberal, most politically active generation to ever hit the American colleges," Deirdre English has written recently.<sup>2</sup> "As grey hair begins to spread like a brush fire through the 'youth' generation, so does self-doubt. Why have we not been more successful at... making our ideals come true?"

This failure of vision, a vision upon which many of us have based our lives, is painful to face. No one can say where we will arrive in our attempt to distinguish the illusory elements of the old vision from its truth. Radicals today are experiencing the death of an era without knowing what the new one holds in store. Moreover, this 'youth' generation is experiencing a mid-life crisis, with its agonizing choices over career, community and childraising, based on the assumption that things may not change.

Our reality parallels the novel's also in the terrible sense of isolation that the characters wrestle with. Their isolation from the political structure is caused primarily by repression. Our isolation is more cultural, a product of the saturation of daily life by capitalist norms (i.e., the atomization of life in the modern apartment building), especially by the media. A feeling of political isolation is undoubtedly the major reason for the retreat of many radicals into an "anyone but Reagan" stance. But the isolation persists. What else can one feel during recent outbursts of media-inflamed patriotism occasioned by the Iranian hostage crisis, the Grenada invasion or the

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1984 Olympics? The present dynamics of bourgeois democracy have allowed most white radicals to avoid the isolation of prison or exile. Yet given the shape of things to come, can we feel exempt from such a fate as befalls the characters of this novel?

*Midnight in the Century* can be read as a commentary on fate.<sup>3</sup> Set in the spring of 1934, a natural cycle of rebirth ironically coincides with a political cycle of repression, due to the necessities of forced collectivization in agriculture. To the exiles, repression has become as inexorable as the seasons. But the threadbare network of the opposition is also fated to live, like a flower sprouting from concrete. In a chapter entitled "Messages" Serge depicts a criminally complacent, self-satisfied engineer named "Botkin" who is caught reading oppositional literature on a trip abroad, and deported to a Siberian construction site. There in a planning office he discovers for the first time the joy of free thought with a younger exile who convinces Botkin to use his photographic memory of the *Opposition Bulletin* to send out miniature facsimiles of it to prisoners and exiles all over the Soviet Union. One of these is young Rodion in Chernoe, who is motivated to flee into the forest rather than follow his more orthodox comrades back into prison, "a subterranean world where people lived like larvae in a kind of slow delirium . . ."

Rodion attempts escape, driven by an "odd elation," an elation which is the life blood of this novel, contained within a grim realism. *Midnight* is imbued with what its translator<sup>4</sup> calls "cosmic lyricism"; an operatic mode where humanity, the earth and the stars are sung to, where an animal joy at physical survival merges with a human joy of fighting for one's own beliefs until death.

Vital to this approach are Serge's finely drawn characters, who are rarely "flat" whether they are a street urchin in Chernoe or Stalin at a Politbureau meeting in

Moscow. His rendering of place, a peasant hut or a sanitized Moscow cafeteria, the stinking barracks of a jail or a primeval forest, is evocative. Serge's Marxism did not prevent him from drawing on the literary modernism of Joyce, Dos Passos or Boris Pilniak. The central character of Serge's novels is a collectivity and there are abrupt shifts in setting or point of view.

Finally the portrait of the Bolshevik oppositional exiles, who experienced both the heights and the utter depths of the 20th century, constitutes a monument to their heroism, notwithstanding the realism with which they are treated. For this is no Spartacist League version of literature, with eternally correct Trotskyists being eternally crushed by the evil betrayers of the proletariat. Neither does *Midnight in the Century* take a position of metaphysical pessimism, like Koestler's *Darkness at Noon*. Serge stands with the revolutionary wave of the 20th century without every losing sight of the human beings in its midst. What could be obscure about a novel which so profoundly describes the delicate balance required of us *today*—persistent questioning of our shortfalls, yet an intransigence and faith in battle? ■

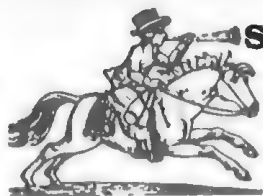
<sup>1</sup> From the first page of Serge's *Memoirs of a Revolutionary*, 1980, London, Oxford University Press.

<sup>2</sup> From "How to Beat Reagan" April 1984 *Mother Jones*, p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> This is also true to an even greater extent of Serge's novel about the Great Purges, *The Case of Comrade Tulayev*, 1950, New York, Doubleday.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Greeman the translator, seems to have carried out a singlehanded campaign for nearly 20 years to bring Serge's novels to the light of day in the US. His translations include excellent commentaries to which I am indebted. He is working on a biographical study of Serge, *The Writer as Witness*.

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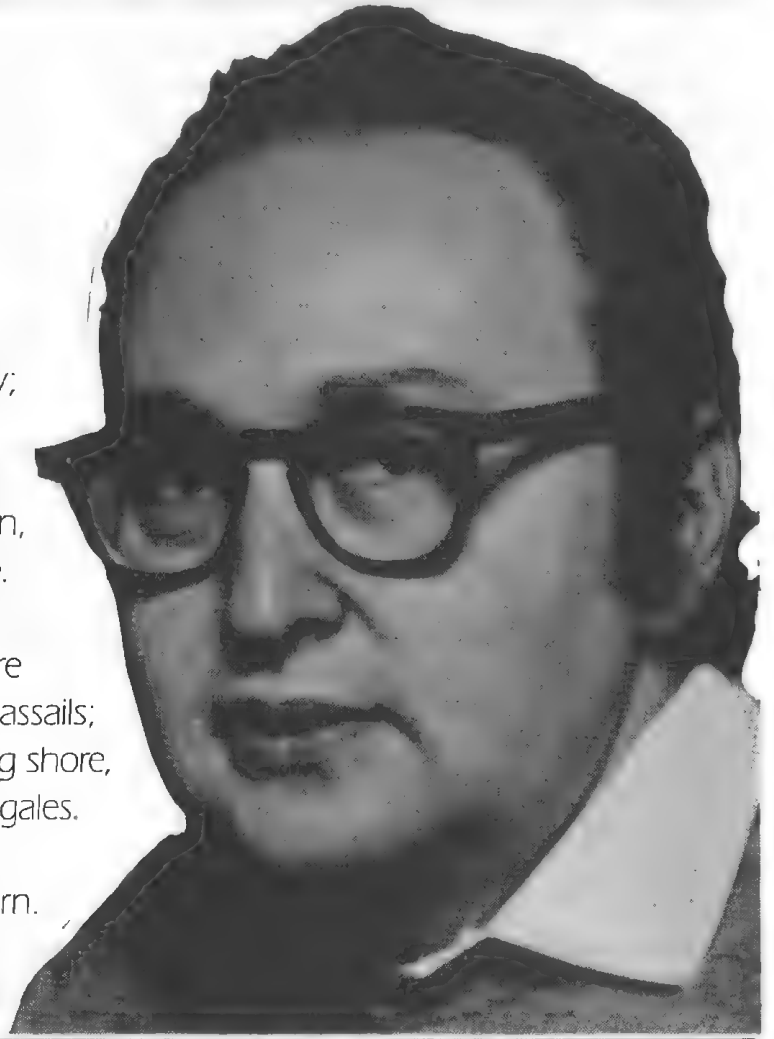
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## PITY ME NOT

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Pity me not because the light of day  
At close of day no longer walks the sky;  
Pity me not for beauties passed away  
From field and thicket as the year goes by;  
Pity me not the waning of the moon,  
Nor that the ebbing tide goes out to sea,  
Nor that a man's desire is hushed so soon,  
And you no longer look with love on me.

This have I known always: love is no more  
Than the wide blossom which the wind assails;  
Than the great tide that treads the shifting shore,  
Strewing fresh wreckage gathered in the gales.  
Pity me that the heart is slow to learn  
What the swift mind beholds at every turn.



---

a favorite from Steve's collection

As many readers of *Against The Current* know, Steve Zeluck, founder and editor of this journal and lifelong revolutionary, died of Mesothelioma on March 1, 1985. His comrades, friends and family organized three memorial meetings, in New York, Los Angeles and San Francisco, to give some of the hundreds of people whose lives had been deeply touched by this extraordinary man an opportunity to remember him and to express and share the significance he had held for them, as political thinker, organizer and teacher, and as personal friend and comrade.

These meetings were fitting memorials for Steve, not only in the fact that the dozens of speakers reflected, in their remarks, the very values he had always sought to realize, but because, in the inspirational effect they had on so many who attended, they turned out to be highly political events in and of themselves, something which, we suspect, would have been the main value Steve would have seen in them. In New York, for instance, where about 250 people attended, several people came up to the memorial organizers afterwards and expressed the desire to become more active politically, and several expressed their intention to join a regrouped revolutionary organization when it is brought about. Moreover, in the weeks following the memorial meetings, ATC received nearly \$2000 in contributions that were sent specifically to honor Steve's memory.

The tenor and content of most speakers' tributes, whether they focused on Steve's career as a leading labor militant, or as a socialist thinker, or whether they referred to his tireless efforts to build this journal and to promote revolutionary socialist regroupment, were fully within the best tradition of Joe Hill's "Don't Mourn; Organize!" It is in this spirit that we reproduce here excerpts from some of the remarks presented to honor Steve and to affirm his revolutionary goals as those for which we continue to struggle.

Peter Dawtdowicz, a jazz musician and political militant, was a founding member of the Independent Socialist Clubs, the International Socialists and Workers' Power

Steve was a model leader for me, not so much because he thought so well, but because he cared so much. His fervor was aimed not only at the big questions, such as how to characterize the regime in the Soviet Union, or in Nicaragua; or what strategies revolutionaries in South Africa or in Poland should follow. Nor did it stop at the level of being passionately involved in every twist and turn of the progress of rank and file movements in any union: whether auto workers, steel workers, teamsters or teachers. His passion was just as manifest in his concern for our reaching, recruiting and educating any individual woman or man who could help build our small revolutionary socialist organization. In remembering the hours I spent in his living room over the years, I realize that, probably, more than half of our time in conversations was devoted to discussing individual contacts or newer members: what could be done to recruit this person; how is this comrade developing, etc., etc. And not just about newer members or contacts, but more established ones like myself for instance. I'd be quite wealthy by now, if I had a dollar for every time Steve tried, with whatever angle he could muster, to get me to take a job in the New York City public school system, so that I could be active in the union...

In the last couple of years, this passionate impatience of Steve's was increasingly focused on one particular vision: the overcoming of the destructive fragmentation of the revolutionary left in the U.S. by a regroupment of revolutionary socialists. He felt strongly that all those of us who share a vision of socialism as the victory of democratic, mass struggles from below, and who have maintained our allegiance to the working class rather than any would-be elite should put our efforts together to create a significant pole of attraction for the Left; in the face of so much right-ward drift. Earlier than most of us, Steve was almost obsessed with this goal. It is the main reason for his nearly super-human work to build *Against the Current* into a journal read and respected throughout the revolutionary left, and it was the object of countless hours of meetings, phone calls, and even trips in the last months of his life as a political activist.

Barbara Zeluck is a long-time activist in the women's movement and was Steve's companion and comrade for over 20 years.

I'm going to start with the letter we received from Pete Camarata—militant rank & file leader of TDU because his letter ends where I had planned to begin:

It's with deep regret that I learned of the death of Steve. I will surely miss our talks and the advice he gave me concerning the union work in the teamsters and the Rank & File movement. I owe much of my political education to Steve and will never forget him for it.

I've paused several times over the last few weeks to remember his kind and gentle ways; and his keen ability to analyze complex political situations. And his goal of a unified Left in this country is a goal that we, his comrades, must continue to struggle to achieve.

Steve realized that his political role in these tough times was to carry Socialist ideas to the next generation, and this he did in an admirable fashion. Steve lives in the ideas we carry and when the Revolution is achieved, he will be as much a part of it as those who see it. And, finally, knowing Steve, I'm sure his sentiments would be the same as the great I.W.W. Organizer Joe Hill, who said shortly before his death, "Don't Mourn—Organize."

Comradely, Pete Camarata

"Don't mourn, organize"  
That's my personal bent.

There's no way to bring Steve back. Once the effect of his physical wounds from class warfare showed up, there was no way to save him—only to try to make him a little less miserable during what turned out to be his 9 month decline.

We will all miss his presence, the breadth of his knowledge, his wisdom (which is different from knowledge), his patience... and his love. But, as Steve said to me during his illness once when he didn't feel like talking with comrades, "They (i.e. WE) will have to learn to get along without me."

## Against the Current

We will do our best to carry on the struggle in which Steve was engaged during all of his too brief life.

I mentioned before that Steve died of *physical* wounds received in *class warfare*. From 1939 to '42, after high school, he went to work in a Philadelphia shipyard—in order to participate in workers' struggles and to be in a position to suggest winning strategies—class struggle strategies. Neither he nor other shipyard workers knew that by working there they were *literally* putting their lives on the line.

But the bosses knew—and had known for at least 10 years—that asbestos is a *killer*: thru asbestosis, lung cancer and *mesothelioma* (a cancer that strangles the lung and suffocates the victim).

I contend that Steve, like the 800 shipyard workers a year who die of mesothelioma, was *murdered*.

I won't take the time today to acquaint you with the many quotes from company files or from medical research that the companies for years succeeded in *suppressing*. Only one—an argument that workers whom medical exams showed to be already crippled by asbestos exposure should not be told of their condition:

"As long as the man is not disabled it is felt that he should not be told of his condition so that he can live and work in peace and the company can benefit by his many years of experience." (my emphasis)

In cold blood this means:

What does a *human* life count when *capitalist* profits are at stake?

I couldn't save Steve's life, but I can play a small part in the self-organization of still living asbestos victims, bereaved family members, and the Occupational Safety and Health movement—working to stop the production of asbestos altogether.

As an activist I will argue that a *class* system that *knowingly* sacrifices workers' lives to the profit hunger of a few *must* be replaced (even if only as a form of life insurance).

Will this argument be successful in raising class consciousness? Who knows: Certainly not without organizational back-up—because disembodied ideas have no power to change the world.

Friends and comrades who've spoken today have sketched out the political and organizational ideas and goals to which Steve devoted his life.

He was optimistic—as you can hear from 2 lines he jotted down in the last months of his life:

"What hath man wrought"

and what BRAVE NEW WORLDS to come as well

Steve is no longer with us to lead the struggle, but we can keep his spirit alive if we

Don't mourn  
Organize!

\* \* \*

March 11, 1985

Dear comrades:

We in the IS were deeply saddened by the news of Steve Zeluck's untimely death. Steve's commitment to the cause of revolutionary socialism and workers' democracy spanned several of the most difficult decades for the socialist movement in America. He represented our movement's best tradition of "critical com-

mitment": the ability to combine a passionate and activist commitment to struggle with a willingness to frankly recognize the shortcomings and weaknesses of the socialist movement and of the broad labor movement.

As a socialist and a trade unionist, Steve was one of those all-too-few veterans of the struggle who forcefully reminded the newer activists who came to socialist politics from the New Left that socialism can triumph only as the conscious act, and out of the struggles of, the working class. There were times when it was fashionable for the left to write off the working class as the agent of socialism, or to envision some short cut to revolution that might bypass the long, difficult road of building the day-to-day struggle. Steve and other comrades from his generation, such as Art Fox, who had remained active through the worst years of reaction, were there to show by their arguments and their example that there are no shortcuts or substitutes for the class struggle.

Steve was also not afraid of new ideas or controversy. In recent years his work on the journal *Against the Current* and his contributions to examining the origins of Lenin's views on organization and their relevance for revolutionary socialists today embodied a creative, non-dogmatic spirit. His work was cut short when it was far from complete, and his death is a great loss not only to Workers' Power but to ourselves and to the entire socialist left.

With Comradely Greetings,  
Political Committee, International Socialists

\* \* \*

Alice Peurla is a long-time socialist activist in the labor movement. She was the first woman elected President of a United Steelworkers of America local in the basic steel industry.

I am sorry that I am unable to be here today. My own cancer treatment and my local union campaign prevent my coming.

I miss Steve already. He was my friend and comrade for over 35 years, encouraging, teaching, helping with strategy throughout many different kinds of union campaigns.

Although he was in New York and I in Chicago, we spoke often, and his advice and guidance will sustain me and I am sure many others in our movement for a better world. His loss is incalculable. His brilliant, sharp mind, his devotion to the movement cannot be replaced, but his efforts to help guide our movement and his personal warmth as a human being will live on.

We must redouble our efforts and carry on. He would want it that way.

My warmest sympathy to his family.

\* \* \*

Dot Peters is another veteran socialist and labor activist. She currently lives in New York, teaches in the public schools & works on Chalk Dust, a rank and file newsletter in the United Federation of Teachers.

I am speaking for two today—Alice Peurla in Chicago and myself. Alice and I go back a long way with Steve—some 35 years.

Alice, who is in her own battle with cancer, was, as you know, the first woman ever to become president of a local union in the basic steel industry, at that time representing a plant with some 10,000 workers. One reason she isn't here today is that she's running for president again. The election is in a couple of weeks.

Alice and I came to know Steve in the 50's—in the McCarthy period which preceded the civil rights movement of the 60's.



I had been working as an in-plant organizer for the bakery and confectionary local and a retail local of the Chicago Joint Board of the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union, and was then on staff. Alice was organizing a retail store. We were both looking for political direction. In those days the Socialist Workers Party had a proletarian orientation. Farrell Dobbs was Chicago organizer and, as master union strategist, was the one that drew us. But I would never have joined the SWP except for Steve.

Much as I was attracted to the ideas and energy and focus of the left groups, I was highly suspicious of anything that smacked of dogma and blind faith and eternal truths. And there was the SWP maintaining that Russia was a workers state, and there was Steve disagreeing. The SWP was willing in those days to tolerate disagreement in its ranks and even to permit those disagreeing comrades to discuss their views with outsiders.

This freedom to think my own thoughts and to disagree was critical to me. And it seems to be that if the left can continue to be that open—valuing study, thought and disagreement—then the left can avoid being the mirror of the right, and will be mobile enough to meet changing times and to hold together as a force, when dissension, which is inevitable, arises.

And so it was that we came to the SWP. Because of Steve.

And so it was that our education began.

I read everything he put into my hands. He patiently listened to my stupid questions, to my tentative positions. He never polemicized against me in a way that would have pushed me to defend a position I only half held and would otherwise modify. The idea for him was not to win the argument, but to educate. He listened in a respectful, thoughtful way and discussed quietly. Never have I encountered such a mind like his—not only did he understand easily those ideas I could only grasp the edges of, not only could he stand off and critique them, but he could also pose alternatives. And always he studied, examined, researched. In those days his was research on capital formation in underdeveloped countries, where third world forces were nationalizing without help from the proletariat, and studying also the early Black struggles in our own history.

What was it like in a very personal way in the party in the McCarthy period? For some very hard. We knew there were spies. We didn't know who they were. Some comrades were forced to leave the party, fearful of losing jobs or being banned from their professions. But even in those hard times there were victories. Our trade union work brought a small cadre of Black workers into the Chicago branch.

As for ourselves, we were young enough and without family responsibilities. We could afford to maintain our own defiance, our own integrity, to stay in the party. And we had each other, and we had fun together.

Talking about it last night, Alice and I remembered when we had an apartment together—a sort of commune—my husband and I, Steve and Irving and Alice. We didn't talk about women's lib in those days. The current movement had not been born, but we remembered the surprise on our landlord's face when he came up one night. Alice and I were on step-ladders hanging wallpaper. Steve and Irving were cooking dinner.

We also remembered that she and I were bugs for cleanliness, taking a toothbrush to the living room corner moldings every Saturday. Steve and Irv were slobs. They had to keep their bedroom door closed, otherwise the rolls of dust would waft their way out into the hall.

Alice remembers the Dagwood sandwiches—Steve was working at International Harvester and she at Stewart Warner. Every night they'd be together piling on the tuna fish, the ham, the cheese, getting ready for the next day's lunch.

It was a happy life. Often we'd work all day, sell the *Millitant* in the afternoon, go to a meeting, then to a movie, come home at 3 AM. What more could one want. And perhaps there's a lesson in that, too. How in the hard times we in the left sustain each other—not only with our politics, but mostly with our support for each other.

*Low Friedman is a NYC highschool teacher.*

I have been asked to speak about my relationship with Steve for three reasons—one, I have worked with him for 20 years beginning in the anti-war movement during the mid-60's—two, I am a member of Workers' Power, recruited by Steve, and I am a member of *Chalk Dust* a rank-and-file group within the United Federation of Teachers. *Chalk Dust* was the last rank-and-file organization to which Steve belonged.

When *Chalk Dust* was formed, Steve involved himself from its inception. Even in this period, where there are so few successes and so little participation, Steve would trek into Brooklyn every other week to our group meetings. Few in the movement willingly cross the East River to enter our borough, but Steve would come early with a pot of soup or some other dish to participate in our pot lucks. Steve never shirked from the work which a rank-and-file group and newsletter demanded. He discussed, he questioned, he suggested, he wrote, he edited, he carried the newsletter to and from the printer if necessary. He even delivered our literature to schools during the day, since he was retired. Never did he use excuses that he was involved in other, perhaps more intellectual, work—which as we all know, he was.

In our group Steve was a real political teacher. He was never satisfied until we came to the best political position which we could develop. He didn't always agree with the position, but he consistently questioned the members, probing politically, trying to persuade us to deal with the issues of the schools in the most political way. I don't think he was ever *really* satisfied that we were ever dealing with *all* the political questions, but he never gave up.

In the beginning, I think some in our group were somewhat uncomfortable with this "ideologue" who wasn't a N.Y.C. school teacher and who wasn't even teaching, but I think within a couple of years that changed. Steve proved himself, proved his honest intentions and proved his worth to us all. He was always someone to depend on, sharing with us his vast reservoir of experience in the movement. There were times when advice was needed in critical situations, be it a wildcat strike, a line in a speech, a difficulty in finishing an article, a community action, the text of a resolution to the union—we always contacted Steve at any time of the day or night and never did he indicate resentment, in fact, he welcomed the opportunity to advise.

Steve was probably the *best* teacher I have ever had. Hopefully, I will be able to continue in the movement using that which I have learned from him. For us in the teachers' movement—in *Chalk Dust*—and in Workers' Power, it will be more difficult, but we will continue and we will try to be what Steve perceived us to be.

\* \* \*

ALAN SHAPIRO

On June 12, 1969 the first page headline in New Rochelle's *Standard Star* read "Strike On..." and quotes Steve Zeluck, President of the New Rochelle Federation of Teachers: "Teachers are determined to meet and reverse the decay that is taking place in the schools."

\* \* \*

## Against the Current

The article goes on to say: "Mr. Zeluck blamed the decay on inept leadership of the school board, which, he said, prevents any real change without teacher participation and a 'real voice' in policy."

A "real voice" for teachers and "real change" were among the keys to Steve's thinking and leadership during the late 1950s and through the 1960s when we worked together in the New Rochelle teacher union.

Another was linking the teachers' struggle with that of other working class people, with the civil rights and women's movements in the United States and with struggling peoples internationally. That is why he led us teachers in picketing at the site where Macy's was being built in New Rochelle and where blacks were excluded from construction unions.

Steve was also a strong supporter of democratic unionism. In 1968 he invited leaders of the UFT opposition in the Ocean Hill-Brownsville strike to speak along with UFT representatives at a union meeting. The UFT reps never appeared, and Steve was eventually censored by the state organization for taking the AFT's motto seriously: "Democracy in Education; Education for Democracy." One of his finest qualities was his insistence always that those in opposition—including those in opposition to his own leadership—be given every opportunity to express themselves.

Steve was a teacher of teachers. He taught us strategy as well as tactics. In our meetings we discussed issues and sometimes argued for hours. But despite our strong differences at times, Steve helped to promote a working atmosphere that created respect for varying points of view and a comradeship that saw us through some difficult times.

Another of Steve's memorable characteristics was his interest in other people and what interested them. When I talked with him about my passion for ancient Greece, he listened, asked questions and wanted to understand why I cared so much. And then, perhaps a month later, he would drop off at my house Perry Anderson's *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism* or George Thomson's *Aschylus and Athens*. And if I talked about some of Melville's stories and novels, I would receive in the mail after a few weeks a copy of C.L.R. James' *Martiners, Renegades and Castaways: The Story of Herman Melville and the World We Live In*.

Steve was always interested in the world we live in and always found a way of linking that interest with yours.

At times I gave Steve a book. The last was a slim volume of Sappho's poems. The last poem in that book speaks for and of him even if Steve's muse wasn't one of those who lived on Mt. Helicon:

I have no complaint

Prosperity that  
the golden Muses  
gave me was no  
delusion; dead, I  
won't be forgotten

\* \* \*

Bob Brenner, a well-known historian, is an editor of *Against the Current* and a member of Workers' Power.

I met Steve in the early 70's, when I first came around the International Socialists. Like a number of people here, I came to revolutionary socialist politics by way of

the New Left—the student movement, the anti-imperialist movement, SDS. For me—and I think a lot of others of my generation who took this route—Steve, and a very small number of others like him, were incredibly important, because they offered us a real dynamic connection with the Marxist revolutionary movement which has its origins in this country between the two world wars.

Steve was one of the very few from the so-called Old Left—and there are others here today—who managed to stick it out through the incredibly difficult times of the 50's and to emerge as a creative political force when the left revived in the 60's and 70's. So, Steve was one of the few who was there to give us a model, a precious and irreplaceable sort of revolutionary inspiration.

I know that Steve's connections with that earlier generation of revolution was very important to him. Above all, it may have helped him to hold onto an approach to politics which is very rare today, and to pass that on to us.

Like those earlier revolutionaries who inspired him, Steve lived and breathed politics. He cared passionately about every political question—the big ones like reform and revolution, the Russian question, and so forth, but also the day-to-day problems of the movement. Moreover, like the earlier generations of revolutionaries, Steve held strong and very well worked out views on most things. He considered it his responsibility to do so. Nevertheless, somehow, like those earlier revolutionaries who had the advantage of actually living through great revolutionary events, Steve instinctively understood that any *serious* political movement, if it is really *alive*, will, of necessity, contain differences of opinion. Indeed enormous differences of opinion . . . and that these differences are not only necessary, but a sign of health.

It may seem like a funny thing to say about the left—but, on the basis of my own limited experience I think that it is true—one of the things that set Steve apart from most of the politicians around him was that he was a political leader who held quite particular ideas very strongly, yet did not delude himself into the belief in his absolute correctness. On the contrary, Steve lived more or less permanently, I think, in the agonizing tensions between an unshakeable revolutionary commitment and the knowledge that he would never have certainty about the course he was taking.

Unfortunately, it seems that for a lot of people—not just so-called rank and filers, but leaders especially—the sort of openness and lack of certainty which Steve betrayed is, as they say, *non-adaptive*. It's just too hard psychologically to continue the unrewarding slog of political work without the certainty of dogma. It's just too *risky*, to try to hold a group together without giving off the aura of the leader as superscientist and without trying to conceal the whole truth from the rank and file. Yet, Steve knew that this is exactly what has to be done . . . or else we'd end up no better than religious sects . . . as much of the left has.

The thing is that Steve didn't need the crutch of certainty. Even more important, he did not need the crutch of the *appearance* of certainty. I think it was Steve's capacity to be both a "hard Marxist" and to know that he might be wrong about many things, which allowed him to make the extraordinary contributions he did, right up to the end, even in this very discouraging period we've been living through.



It was no accident, I think, that Steve was the driving force behind the difficult conception of *Against the Current* as a journal which would *both* present a consistent perspective *and* which would welcome contributions from the widest variety of different political tendencies. Unlike many others, Steve simply saw no contradiction in this. He knew that you can't function politically without a line, so to speak. But he also knew that you had to be prepared to learn from your ideological competitors, and to be prepared to change your position.

It was no accident, too, that Steve was the major force behind the campaign for revolutionary socialist regroupment, which Workers' Power and a number of other groups have been trying to bring to fruition over the past several years. Steve was painfully aware that far too many of the divisions which persist on the left express no really serious political differences, but merely the obsessive fear on the part of both their leaderships and their memberships that trying to live with differences and uncertainty, will surely lead to confusion, demoralization, and ultimately dissolution. Steve knew that precisely the opposite was true . . . at least for those groups which pretend to relate to the world as it is.

Finally, it was no accident that, even as things got much worse politically in the late 70's and early 80's, Steve still continued to inspire, small but significant generations of young people—people who, like Steve, were proud to think of themselves as revolutionary socialists, no matter how unfashionable and *passee* that had become . . . and yet who didn't feel the need to wear that title as an insignia of moral superiority or a sign of the possession of the truth.

I think, if we are to survive as revolutionaries, we will have to learn, somehow, to live as both committed socialists *and* as uncertain people. Steve's biggest contribution may have been his example, to show us that that is possible. He will be missed.

\* \* \*

*Stan Heller teaches in Connecticut, was a vice-president of the Connecticut Federation of Teachers and is a member of Workers' Power.*

We are suffering through an ebb tide of teacher unionism. Our national union, the AFT, is in alliance with Reagan. There are little pools of opposition but frankly they amount to very little.

It was not always so. There was an exhilarating period when there was an important radical current within the union. Steve was key to its force and direction. In 1967 Steve and others formed a grouping within the national union called the New Caucus. Its program was openly radical. For example it proposed a one day national teacher's strike to demand more Federal money for public schools. In 1968 at a time when unions were gung-ho for the Vietnam War, the caucus was able to push through a peace resolution at the national AFT convention. That year its candidates won 25% of the vote in elections for national AFT offices.

The successes of the New Caucus took place against a backdrop of a decade of unprecedented AFT growth. In the early 1950's the AFT did not have a single collective bargaining contract. In 1956 it cuts its own size by a fifth by expelling 8000 members in southern locals that refused to integrate. Yet by the end of the 60's the AFT stood a quarter of a million strong. Across the nation the major cities were AFT. The reason for this startling

growth was the AFT strategy of seizing collective bargaining rights by launching a series of dramatic illegal strikes.

In 1968 the tide turned inside the AFT, for that was the year of Ocean Hill Brownsville and the break with the Black community. The civil rights movement had given birth to the Black power movement. Frustrated by conditions in ghetto schools a popular struggle grew for what was called "community control." There was a lot wrong with the concept and some of the Black activists were anti-teacher and anti-union, but at bottom their struggle was for the same things the AFT said it was fighting for, taking power from the establishment so the schools could serve the needs of the kids.

Instead of trying to work out an agreement with the community control activists, Al Shanker's New York City local decided to fight them tooth and nail. In a series of three strikes the union allied itself with administrators, the educational bureaucracy, the parochial schools and conservative politicians and crushed the drive for "community control." In the midst of the struggle Steve Zeluck put out a pamphlet called, "The UFT Strike, A blow against Teacher Unionism." In it he prophetically warned, "The union may well win, possibly with the eager help of those same anti-labor, reactionary legislators whose aid they have had before. But in winning, the union will take on itself the blame for the death of community control. In winning, the union will be blamed for the inevitable increase in racism and decrease in education in the schools. In winning the union will have contributed heavily to the black-white polarization taking place in this country and all that portends."

Mainstream AFT leaders supported Shanker and the logic of this break with the Black community led the AFT further and further to the right. There were many important battles in the early 1970's in which the Left played a part but the struggle was unequal. Within a few years the New Caucus was finished and the influence of radicals steeply waned. Today at the national level, there is no opposition to Shanker other than a pathetic Stalinist/liberal rivulet.

For those of us who spent so many years of work in the AFT we have to look back with a degree of melancholy and bitterness. Yet while our institutional success has all evaporated, we can take some satisfaction in our understanding of events and pride in our proposals for action. Nowhere was this better done than by Steve Zeluck in a pamphlet he wrote for the International Socialists in 1973 called "Toward Teacher Power." The ideas are just as good now as they were then. Within the AFT several score of us are going to remember the ideas Steve championed for the rest of our life.

\* \* \*

*SEYMOUR N. KRAMER is a long time activist in the Bay Area labor movement. He was the first poet elected President of an Amalgamated Transport Union local.*

It was either Freud, or one of his discontents, who argued that ambiguity was the perfect growth medium for the neurotic's projections. And what could be more ambiguous than someone else's life. In that case I would ask your understanding if what I have to say today has as much to do with my own ghosts as it does with Steve's spirit.



1.

Two things have preoccupied my thoughts about Steve. First, how likeable he was, how instantly I took to him; and secondly, "who" he was politically for me!

I only knew Steve during a short scene in his drama . . . his effort to save his "tendency" in the course of the disputes in the U.S.; his sadness at the slow progress and conflicts in the production of *Against the Current*; his anger at what he took to be my political immaturity and I took to be my political genius. These were among the issues that Steve was wrestling with in the three or four years that I actively knew him.

But his LIFE—his individual political economy, if you will—touches me more deeply at another level. Steve not only looked strikingly like my father—a resemblance that both delighted and disturbed me—but he was also part of what some of the Kids on my bus might call *Your Whole Generation*.

I want to try and get at this slowly by reading a poem I wrote a few years ago called *Mrs. Freud's "Widow Dream of Separation"*:

*Mrs. Freud's Widow Dream of Separation*

carries roseweed the rivers corpse  
or so it seemed

our widow strides the train's aisle  
sipping spit until a tunnel

her sullen notes these things

when rings thick the trees  
boats listing at a bridge of the canal  
the farmer thawing in the river bed  
then the farm

vienna has gates and cream

the gentiles keep the keys

their bellies sit above their belts  
like cats  
on a buckled roof

the jews are funny

they invented night clubs  
rearranged the novel's meter  
found a tone in paving squares  
they like to swallow wire

lower his box from the late morning coach

her sweat cases

the wooden footfall of the pier

the harbor stiff  
sunning its locked spine  
on the bank

ring the lighthouse bell

let out a sailing flag

but first  
smash their wireless

never let them send us any messages

no reports of seams and tears

the early morning gales  
ice floes

wild laughter at the edges of the sea

we take no interest in this withdrawal

cells are spreading in the jaw  
leaving dreams alone

This poem is a distanced rumination about death—a playing around with the slang of death to avoid its teeth. It is also a poem that moves with a distant rumbling of the holocaust—not, the physical destruction of the Jews, but their loneliness, their horrible solitude in the world as they were cast out.

But at the center of the poem—what I am drawn to is a celebration of the remarkable culture created by the Jewish artists, writers, scientists, organizers and workers of Central and Eastern Europe. This was, I think, in many ways the world that gave us Steve Zeluck.

—the nursery his principles were weaned in  
—the school in which he learned his deepest lessons  
—the texts from which he drew his program

Here was a culture of overdetermined rationalism, with all the wonders, crimes and little murders that cling to that logical way of "being" in the world.

Here was a "faith" whose icon was the filled bookshelf and whose ritual was the street corner discussion, the congress debate, the dinner table argument and the coffeehouse war.

This was a culture anticipated in the marrow of Karl Marx's constitution; whose purist achievements were Einstein and Freud and a certain differentiated element of the Russian Revolution—It's FATE, from October through Stalin to Gorbachov which has always been for Trotskyists and New York Jewish Marxists and for Steve, in particular, what Lacanian revisionists of Jung might call our collective mirror phase.

And why not, for wasn't it precisely this revolution that freed the bulk of Europe's Jews, that beckoned us as if we were unscarred children to enter into the carnival ground of liberation and to find there, as if for the first time, our real modern shape.

This was the culture, in the words of Isaac Deutscher, of the non-Jewish Jew—the Jew who secured his Jewishness by a militant fight against the idea of God; against the rabbis; against all authority in and "out" of the material world—and for a new authority alternately science, progress and for a few of us the free association of the working class—communism.

This was the workshop of Freud's dream-work where he beat his unconscious into night clubs.

This was the workshop of Kafka's word-work where he melted the ingots of romance language into the argot of modernity—the original NEWSPEAK.

This was the workshop of Schoenberg's tone-work where the chaos of the new life found its harmonies.

In politics this culture sought its fullest expression in Marxism—and more particularly in the communism of the heroic phase of the Russian Revolution.

1. In Axelrod, and Martov and Zetkin
2. In Trotsky and Rosa Luxemburg, and the thousands of cadres linked to their names;
3. In the Eastern Jewish communists who retreated with the Red Army from Poland in 1921, formed the core of the young workers state's secret service; who founded the anti-fascist Red Orchestra espionage network in occupied Europe and continued to defend the Soviet state even as they became Trotskyists and could no longer stomach Stalin's rule.

4. This was the culture of Abram Leon and his comrades, publishers of *Arbeiter und Soldat* for German workers imprisoned in their wehrmacht uniforms, up to the dawn of their deportation to Auschwitz.
5. This was the culture of the Workmen's Circle and the Warsaw Ghetto, and of those inmates who executed the Sonderkommando and the SS at Treblinka and set up discussion groups at Majdanek Sobibor and Bergen-Belsen.

I know that what we have lost with Steve's death is simply a good comrade, a friend, a lively fighter and teacher. But my thoughts keep slipping toward this macro-appreciation. And I wonder . . . who is going to keep this tradition alive and who as well as Steve did? Who will find a way to express the pleasures and necessity of intellectual work inside the workers' movement—as Steve did in his various careers as shipyard worker, factory operative and teacher—rather than drawing away in fear from the factory and the street as so much in this tradition instructs.

And who will knead this rich braid into the challah of Marxist renewal that must be prepared by feminists, critical students of psychoanalysis, Sartreans, structuralists and Sandinista chefs.

So in a week that saw Eli Weitzel—that powerful myopic of Jewish suffering—make common moral cause with Ronald Reagan over the graves of the Jewish dead—I want to remind us of another tradition, one that locates Reagan's place in history precisely alongside the SS at Bitburg, that recognizes that the only "problem" in that visit is that he only plans to remain there for a day, that associates the enormity of that crime with the crimes we fight against today from Central America to Soweto, a struggle in which we sadly only have Steve's memory to sustain us rather than his patience, insight, determination and mistakes.

In that spirit I offer this secular Kaddish of a militant atheist for our brother and friend Steve.

## 2

This is how I apprehend the Big Steve.

But then there is the real one.

I really liked Steve. I found him to be a warm and kind man who rarely held a grudge. He used to close his notes to me with strange salutations like "well, Dearie."

Whenever we would talk on the phone he would always begin with the big questions:

Not what did I think about Jack Barnes' revision of *Permanent Revolution*

Or how did I feel about the stubborn refusal of the rate of profit to behave the way Ernest Mandel said it should.

But

How was I?

How was my love life?

Had I seen this movie or that play?

What did I think of the Knicks acquisition of Bernard King?

This was a tender and caring man.

Perhaps this was what some of us took for his famous political softness—as if being hard was a virtue in any world other than the world of stone walls and obstacles we call Leninism.

Like others here I used to wish that Steve would be a little firmer—especially when he was on my side of a dispute—But I can't imagine Steve wanting to expel any-

one from anything. He always worked to bring people around.

Steve once told me that he was against every split he had ever been involved in; and he had known more splits than a pea soup. He went along to save his "tendency" and on the day after the rupture he was always looking for some thread—sometimes the wrong length, strength or color—but some suture to piece things together.

His "softness" again? Or just the way he put the personal and political together.

My fondest memory of Steve took place in Detroit after a TDU conference. We had just finished our post-plebiscite debate. It was about 1:00 a.m. and in the best tradition of Trotskyism we had gone three rounds with many knockouts and *No Decisions*.

I was supposed to share a bed with Steve. Actually it was a mattress that seemed a few years older than the floor it was lumpily sitting on—and I was anxious about the accommodations, nervous about sleeping next to a man who not only looked like my father but snored like him.

But walking hand in hand with my anxiety was a certain contentment with the experience. I remember thinking about this 59 year old man, buzzing next to me on the floor. With his talents he could easily have been rewarded in late capitalist America with prestige, appointments and great audiences. Yet here he was on a leftwing "cot" after a debate with fairly marginal people 25 years his junior. But in his snoring I detected a genuine satisfaction with the life he had chosen. For me, at that moment, I felt the vitality of an older person who was as open to the future as a child. And I sensed the dignity of the decisions that we have made to be organizers for our ideals, to learn to wait patiently for our victories but to glow in them, to find a few comrades that can also be friends, to remember our teachers with warmth and affection.

I want to finish with a short poem. It contains my final impressions of my grandfather; about how life struggles to overcome the most decrepit containers.

### *The Courtyard Dancer* (jack)

his skin is indecision  
the bone's police

there are days when he barely fills out a coat

warm afternoons  
when his legs trail puff steps  
that spread like puddles  
and disappear in the grass

but whether he staggers like a drunk in the courtyard  
kicking a slow worm against the wall

or spills his thick pratfall like a dizzy acrobat's

he still sends arcs across the lawn

still upsets the tables  
spoiling her evening lap with mourning cream

tap on the wood vahayino

could you remain here

softly caressed in the white room



# LETTERS

Letter from Gary Kinsman

To the Editor:

This is in response to Johanna Brenner's article 'Women's Self-Organization: A Marxist Justification.' I found that this article covered some very valuable historical territory and its major argument of the need for autonomous organization of women is quite correct. At the same time I felt there were numerous inadequacies in the historical account that was given, some of which were not cleared up in the responses published in your second issue. In this (hopefully) brief reply I wish to outline a few of the issues I feel must be investigated in more depth. I also wish to criticize the title of the article. It seems to me rather than talking of a marxist 'justification' we should be talking about a transformation of marxism so it can begin to understand the world from the vantage point of women.

Johanna is quite correct to undertake a critique of functionalist explanations of women's oppression (which see women's subordination simply performing a functional role for capital), and to criticize some of the ahistorical uses of patriarchy that have arisen in some sections of the women's movement. She is quite accurate to point to the central role of the family in the oppression of women. She also suggests at a number of points that male workers do and have gained certain real benefits from the subordination of women. At the same time she is rather unclear on this point, and this aids in making her argument less clear on why we need an autonomous women's movement.

My central critique of her argument revolves around her lack of attention to the divisions between skilled and unskilled workers in the wage-labour force, and the role of the state in instituting a particular pattern of sex-segregation and patriarchy. I feel she also fails to explore the type of real material benefits many male workers have achieved from women's subordination. She isn't really able to explain why women's interests became subordinated in the process of the class struggle.

The transformation from feudalism to capitalism also transformed the family relations and relations of patriarchy that existed in feudal society. Men during the period of transition from feudalism to capitalism played a more public role and concentrated in their hands the major organizing skills in the guilds. As capitalism undermined the previous form of family life, and drew lower class women and children into wage-labour of various forms, skilled male workers of various occupations organized to exclude women and children from competition with them. They also argued that women's proper place was in the home providing support for the working class male. An article by Barbara Taylor in *Feminist Studies* 5, #1 (Spring 1979), called "The Men Are As Bad As Their Masters ...", is a very interesting exploration of the tensions between male and female workers in London's tailoring trade of the early 1830's. Male workers in a number of situations fought to exclude women from work in skilled areas (the whole question of how some work is established as 'skilled' is explored by Anne Phillips and Barbara Taylor in an article entitled "Sex and Skill: Notes Towards a Feminist Economics." in *Feminist Review* #6, 1980), and saw women's activity outside the emerging domestic sphere as a threat to their position.

Male workers in unions fought for two major things in the last century that effected women's situation. Firstly they fought for protective legislation which had the effect of excluding women from the areas of skilled work, and secondly they fought for a family wage that would be paid to the male wage labourer. The male workers' response was not to organize women workers demanding equal pay for them and giving them equal rights in the union movement. Women came to be subordinated in the process of the class struggle and male workers played an important role in this process (particularly the skilled workers organized in these unions' structures). Why was this so?

Previously women had played a central role in community struggles, particularly the bread riots against unjust prices. As Dorothy Thompson explains ('Women and Nineteenth-

Century Radical Politics: A Lost Dimension' in *Rights and Wrongs of Women* edited by Mitchell and Oakley) women were progressively excluded from the organizations of the class struggle as these organizations became more institutionalized and less community based. Women were also assigned exclusive responsibility for the domestic reproduction of the male wage-labourer's capacity to sell his labour power, and to reproduce the next generation of wage-labourers. Women were not passive in this subordination as Taylor pointed out in the example of the tailoring trades. However increasingly women were overcome by the combined power of most unions, the developing policies of the state (more on this in a moment), and by their domestic constraints. Given the desperate economic situation that many working class women faced (particularly those from the unskilled and semi-skilled sections), women's attentions were often occupied by the daily scramble to earn enough money through activities as various as casual prostitution, taking in boarders, to selling goods on the street, to taking in industrial outwork, to whatever sources of employment existed in their area, so their family could survive. Women of the higher strata of the working class may actually have benefited in a very narrow sense from the achievement of a family wage since it would have meant they no longer had to risk their lives in conditions of super-exploited wage-labour. But for the vast majority of the working class the male wage was not sufficient to survive on. At the turn of the century in London's East End only 30% of the population was able to survive solely on the male wage. The effects of the family wage and protective legislation on most women were to separate them off into a subordinate position in a segregated wage-labour force, and to focus their activity in the domestic sphere.

In the United States the American Federation of Labour played a central role in the production of a sex and race segregated wage-labour force with skilled white male labour on top. But even the IWW who broke with craft traditions of organization, and tried to organize unskilled workers was unable to really challenge the patriarchal relations inside the working class (see Foner, *Women and the American Labor Movement*). Later the CIO even though it organized along industrial lines did nothing to seriously challenge the subordination of women in the work-force. However the actions of the working class on their own could not have led to the form of patriarchy and sex-segregation that we have now. The contours of the modern sexual division of labour were formed not only as a result of the pressures of the struggle of organized male workers to defend and better their situation, but also through the policies and actions of the state apparatus through its various agencies.

The state representing the interests of 'capital in general' came to see that it needed to be concerned about the continuing conditions for the reproduction and expansion of capital. The state became concerned about the conditions of the reproduction of the working class and the high rate of infant mortality. This coincided with a shift in the form of capital from a more labour-intensive form of the early industrial revolution, to a more capital-intensive form of labour process. This shift required a more stable work force that is tied to particular jobs and which is reasonably healthy. The state began to intervene in the life of the working class to construct a particular form of family life there. This form was modelled on the middle class family model—a dominant husband, a subordinate and preferably non-wage earning wife, and children. As alluded to earlier this form of the family was also an objective of the skilled sections of the organized working class. The state through protective legislation tried to exclude women from competition with skilled male wage-labour, and through its social policies it tried to construct the role of the working class mother. Anna Davin in an article in *History Workshop*, Issue 5, Spring 1978, called "Imperialism and Motherhood," explains how the British state played an important role in constructing the mothering role for working class women. She also describes how middle class professionals (like doctors and social service workers) began to increasingly step in to organize the contours of working class life.



Part of this process of the organization of working class personal life was the implementation of laws against prostitution and homosexuality. These laws served to separate off these practices from the norms of working class life and to establish new boundaries for working class behaviour. As Walkowitz and Walkowitz explain in an article entitled "We Are Not Beasts Of The Field" (in *Clito's Consciousness Raised*), the effect of the state's intervention against prostitution was to transform the casual activity that many working class women were forced into because of their need for economic support into a stigmatized form of behaviour which was separate from "normal" working class life and became the preserve of the "professional" prostitute.

These social processes of the last century are what has created the contours of the modern forms of capitalist and patriarchal social relations that we face. These social relations are not simply the result of the action of capital, or the state, or the male working class. They are the result of the interaction of these social forces in a concrete historical period. If we are to understand how to uproot women's and all other forms of oppression and exploitation we must understand the different forces that were involved.

These processes of the organization of women's subordination establish a real material division internal to the working class. Male workers gain limited but very real benefits from their wives' unpaid domestic labour, their general and legally sanctioned sexual access to their wives, and the exclusion of women from competition with skilled male labour. The male worker through his control over the 'family wage', or over a larger wage than his wife, establishes his hegemony over the family unit. This process is grounded not simply in the husband's power in the family, but is also constituted by the social and economic relations outside the household, including the development of legal and social policy on the part of the state.

In the last century an informal and often contradictory alliance of skilled male workers, the ruling state apparatus and male professional groups played a crucial role in developing the modern forms of women's oppression. Women were not excluded from all forms of wage-labour but came to inhabit particular low-paid and generally unskilled sectors where they were not in competition with male labour. A particular form of working class patriarchy was formed through this alliance between skilled male workers and the state, which was based on control by the male over the wife's labour and her general subordination to her husband's needs.

The male working class (to paraphrase Marx) acted to make its own history and culture but not in circumstances chosen or created by itself. The male worker was trying to survive and build a life for himself and his family in the constraints of an exploitative social system. Women of the working class were not passive in this process and many fought attempts to reconstruct male dominance, but they were severely constrained by their needs to organize for the survival of the family and to maintain the male worker at a high enough level so he could continue to sell his labour-power. The internal structure of the working class was constituted as a response to the pressures of the economic and social realities of their lives, and was both an attempt by male workers to defend their patriarchal privileges and to defend themselves and their families against exploitation in these circumstances.

The state acted to buttress these tendencies towards working class patriarchy so it could have a mechanism for the stable reproduction of the work-force and as an important means of social control. Sections of the capitalist class itself became interested in enforcing this new form of women's oppression, so as to ensure they would have access to super-exploited female wage-labour in those sectors that had been labelled as 'women's work.' Generally women's economic dependence on men was reinforced and became particularly devastating for single women and widows. The institutionalization of heterosexual family life as a social norm served to reinforce this dependence of women, and to decrease the possibility for women to express and develop their autonomy.

The emergence of this new form of intersection between capitalist and patriarchal relations can help us to clarify the relation between capitalism and patriarchy. Women's oppres-

sion can be explained neither from simply a view of "patriarchy" seen as an autonomous system, nor simply from the interests of capital (i.e. if women's labour power was cheaper to purchase why wouldn't it be in capital's interests to employ more women workers?). We can begin to see how in the actual historical development of society patriarchal relations have shaped the emergence of capitalist relations, and in turn how capitalist relations have transformed patriarchal relations. We can begin to come up with a more total and many-sided explanation of how women came to be oppressed. Male workers played an important role in setting some of the contours of this relationship, but only because an alliance was forged with powerful sections of the state apparatus. Their interests may have been different but in practice an alliance was built which was based on the subordination of working women's (and in a different way middle class women's) interests.

The result of this historical and social process is that there are very real differences in the situations of male and female workers (and differences in other strata of the population between men and women's position). Men generally have power and privileges over women. It is therefore crucially important to recognize that women must organize autonomously to fight male domination in all its forms. Women's interests have always been best advanced when women have self-organized whether as caucuses, committees, or independent groups. It is only women who have the experience of their oppression who can lead in organizing against it. Women's self-organization is also essential to unearth and contest the state's policies which have played such a crucial role in the construction of women's subordination. Women's self-organization poses a new basis for working class unity—one that is no longer based on the domination of men over women, and poses the overcoming of the historical legacy of the alliance between sections of male workers and the state in the organizing of women's oppression. It is only on the basis of women's self-organization, that there can be a real basis for constituting a new basis of unity among the oppressed and the working class in the fight for a new society.

\* \* \*

September 13, 1984

To the ATC Editorial Board  
45 W. 10th ST. 2G  
N.Y., N.Y. 10011

Greetings!

Your statement of purpose in the latest issue of ATC is very welcome. The openness it sets as a goal is one more example of the greater reasonableness of Marxists in their relations with each other in comparison to the attitudes which existed in the 1930's.

I do not share with you your optimism about Marxism. I think instead it is something we need to build on and get beyond. Given the political performance of American workers since World War II, I find little basis for placing any faith in their being the "historic agency" which will push us into a better society. It would not surprise me if a significant percentage of them were to vote for Ronald Reagan, exhibiting thereby the same mentality that so many of them displayed during the Vietnam War, namely. Give me a regular paycheck and take my son and kill him!

The current upsurge of counter-establishment activity in some parts of the working class is of course welcome, but I have seen greater upsurges in the past and even those did nothing in the long run to create a permanent anticapitalist Left.

If anything, I am a "green" rather than a "red" socialist. I am renewing my subscription despite the differences that exist between my position and yours because your views are a lot more useful and stimulating than those I find in the bourgeois press. I hope you will be able to continue along the path you have set for yourselves, and look forward to further issues for me to agree or disagree with.

Sincerely yours,

Laurence G. Wolf

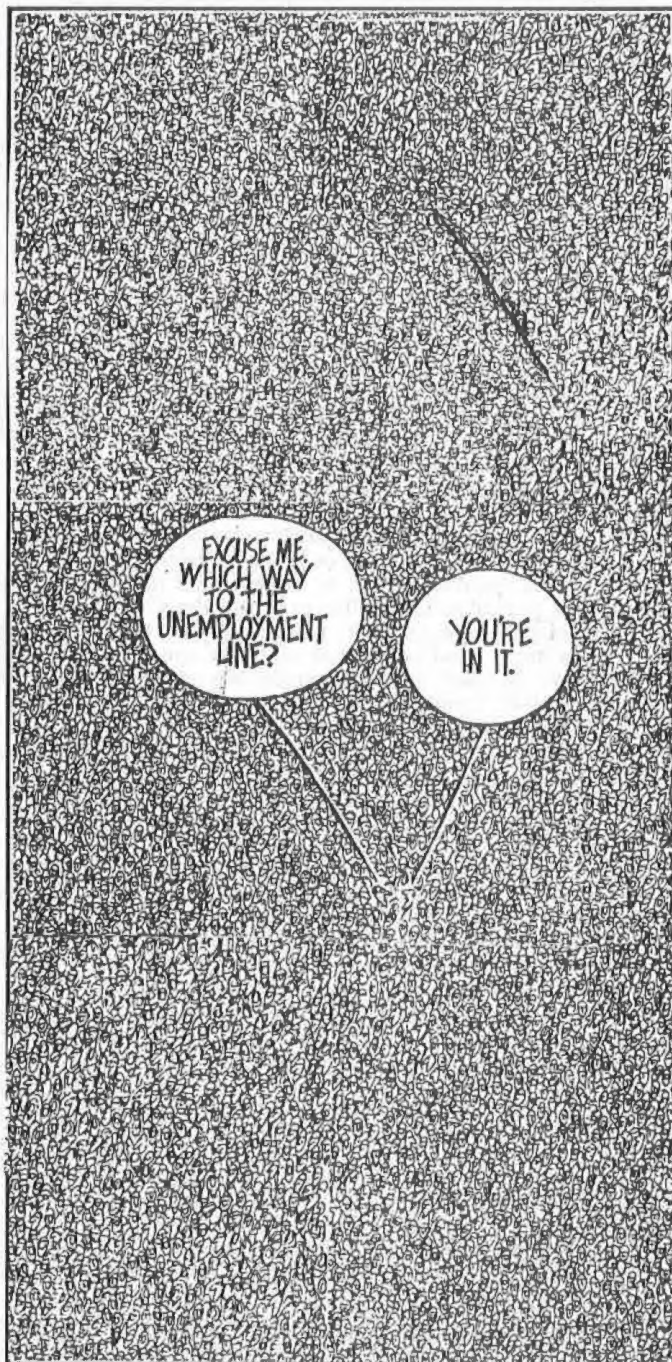




*The dispensary's straight ahead . . .*



*"I'm absolutely against total war, but then  
I'm not for total peace, either."*







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